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By

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Minister in the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and Associate Professor in the Union Theological Seminary, New York City

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To My Father
EDMUND COFFIN
Yale '66

PREFACE

These sermons have been preached in the chapels of Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, Brown, New York and Chicago Universities, and of Williams, Dartmouth, Wellesley, Vassar, Mt. Holyoke and Bryn Mawr Colleges. Some of them have been delivered at the Conferences of the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations at Northfield and Silver Bay. They are published as they were spoken; and they are necessarily colloquial. They were preached to congregations of students having similar needs; and the same ideas recur in them frequently. The only reason for their publication is the desire that has been expressed to possess them in printed form, and to be able to pass them on to others, whose religious wants they may possibly help to bring to the only Source of supply.

December, 1913.

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I

THREE STAGES IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Ezekiel 1: 5, 28. The likeness of four living creatures. The likeness of a man. The likeness of the glory of Jehovah.

In Ezekiel's somewhat fantastic vision there seems to be a mingling of three elements which successively attract attention. We see first the subhuman element; the stormy wind, great cloud, flashing flame, the living creatures with their strange forms, wings and wheels, and with movements comparable to a streak of lightning. Next, intermixed with all this and becoming more and more prominent, we see a human element; the living creatures have the likeness of a man, the hands of a man under their wings, the face of a man. Then, mingling with all and at length occupying our entire thought, is a divine element. "The Spirit of life" controls the movements of the wheels, the noise of the wings of the

creatures is like the voice of the Almighty, and, as we scan the human figure, there is "brightness round about him." "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face."

The successive elements in Ezekiel's vision suggest stages through which many of us pass in our religious experiences. God, as we conceive of Him in childhood, and perhaps in later life if our religious ideas remain childish, is a mysterious and magical creature not unlike Ezekiel's compound of wind, cloud, flame, wings, wheels, lightning. His face is the face of a man, but His movements and methods are like those of a benevolent but capricious fairy; and it is the unmanlike in Him, that in which He is utterly different from us, which attracts our notice and commands our admiration.

We were told that the Bible was God's Book. That meant to us its unlikeness to all other books, its freedom from any imper-

fection or mistake, its accounts of wonderful happenings such as never take place nowadays—angels talking with men, dreams like Jacob's or Joseph's or King Pharaoh's, the parting waters of the Red Sea before Moses and of the Jordan before Joshua, Elijah carried to heaven in a chariot of fire, the three brave Israelites unharmed in the burning furnace and Daniel untouched in the lions' den, animals entering into the affairs of men like Balaam's ass and Jonah's whale. Its miraculous stories offered no difficulty to us; they were what we expected in God's Book; without them the Book would not have had its fascination for us, nor would it have impressed us as sufficiently wonderful to be divine.

We were told that Jesus was God's Son. Our minds naturally dwelt on His bright home in heaven, unlike anything in the world, His great love in coming down to our earth and sharing human life, and on the extraordinary events in the Gospel story—the carolling angels at His birth, the Voice that spoke to Him out of heaven, the attacks of the tempter instantly repelled, the water changed to wine, the winds and

waves stilled by a word, the thousands fed with one little boy's supper, the walking on the sea, the raising of the dead, His own rising from the grave and ascent into the sky. These incidents not only did not trouble us, they were the most interesting and helpful parts of the narrative. They fitted in exactly with our thought of what God's Son would be and do. God was a big fairy and naturally His Son would be fairylike. It was far less entertaining for us to hear and much harder to believe passages where Jesus appears to be tired out, or unable to perform a mighty work, or ignorant of some future event.

We were told to pray, and we asked God for anything it came into our heads to think we wanted. The notion of a law-abiding universe, the idea that we must coöperate with God to answer prayer, never occurred to us. Augustine speaks of himself in childhood as praying "though small, yet with no small earnestness that I might not be beaten at school," but it never entered his mind that the avoiding of the beating was a matter in which he could materially assist the Almighty.

Our religious life was on the creature level in that it was predominantly selfish. The world exists for children, not they for the world.

> All the world I saw or knew
> Seemed a complex Chinese toy,
> Fashioned for a barefoot boy.

It was frankly more blessed for us to receive than to give, and our petitions were personal pleas like the little Augustine's, or if our

> Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep,

concluded with pleas for blessings on others, they were those whose lives meant much to *us*—parents, brother, sister, nurse, friends. When Dr. Thomas Arnold went to Rugby he wrote: "My object will be if possible to form Christian men, for Christian boys I can scarcely hope to make; I mean that from the natural imperfect state of boyhood, they are not susceptible of Christian principles in their full development, and I suspect that a low standard of morals in many respects must be tolerated amongst

them." He lived to modify this opinion; but he was correct in recognizing that much of Jesus' teaching finds nothing to take hold on in children. They can revere and adore the winged creature, they cannot appreciate the man.

Inasmuch as our imaginations were keen, God seemed very real to us. Many children have shared the experience Faber describes in "The God of My Childhood":

O God, who wert my childhood's love,
My boyhood's pure delight,
A presence felt the livelong day,
A welcome fear at night,—

At school Thou wert a kindly Face
Which I could almost see;
But home and holyday appeared
Somehow more full of Thee.

I could not sleep unless Thy Hand
Were underneath my head,
That I might kiss it, if I lay
Wakeful upon my bed.

And quite alone I never felt—
I knew that Thou wert near,
A silence tingling in the room,
A strangely pleasant fear.

But the years which immediately follow childhood are a disillusionizing period. We discover beneath the wings of all our fairy creatures the hands of a man. Santa Claus gives place to affectionate people, and Christmas loses its mysterious delight. Prayer proves to be but the preliminary to effort, a program we must carry out with God, and almost inevitably we pray less. Our studies as we advance give us a world of law, and we are likely to lose the sense of personal touch with the Lawgiver.

The Bible becomes a book of human experience. Its science, history, morals, religious ideas impress us often as very crude. We are struck with the resemblance of Israel's religion at many points to the religions of other peoples. And as for the miraculous stories, we class them with the legends we have learned to expect in all early literature. Instead of being unlike all other books, the Bible seems to us so entirely like many others, that we lose sight altogether of its uniqueness.

Jesus becomes for us frankly a man. We admire His heroism, His broad-mindedness, His loyalty to truth, His glorious self-

sacrifice; but we also recognize what we consider His limitations, the extent to which He shared the world-view of His contemporaries, believing in to us such unbelievable beings as demons, and attributing diseases and insanity to their sinister activity. The miraculous tales about Him we either explain as instances of the power of a superior mind over others, or regard as poetic expressions of spiritual truths.

Contact with fact has sobered and perhaps dulled our imagination, so that we have lost the sense we once possessed of God's nearness.

> I remember, I remember
> The fir trees, dark and high;
> I used to think their slender tops
> Were close against the sky

is followed by the regretful

> Now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm farther off from heaven
> Than when I was a boy.

Thomas Hood was really sighing for a passed fancy, not a passed faith; but since faith must picture Him in whom it believes,

the change in the picture may seriously shake the faith.

There are some manifest gains in this complete humanizing of our religion. We appreciate and try to practice much of the teaching of the Bible, particularly the words of Jesus, that meant nothing to us before. We enter with enthusiasm into Jesus' hope of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, the social order in which men deal justly, kindly and faithfully with one another, and love is supreme. We discover for ourselves that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and all the earnestness we used to put into our prayers to God goes into our service of men. We form strong friendships that were quite impossible to childhood, and begin to explore the height, breadth, depth and length of love. Devotion to duty, honesty in dealing with truth, consecration to humanity make up our religion. We are content to accept the statement of Sir Edward Burne-Jones: "There is only one religion; 'Make the most of your best for the sake of others' is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved."

In a very real sense Jesus means more to us than He ever did. We have exchanged a good fairy for a human brother, tempted in all points like as we are. We draw from the biography of this limited Man, as we now consider Him, a sympathy and an inspiration we never found there before. We prefer to think that He was born as all men have been, had to acquire His force of will by struggle, had to hold His hopes in the face of discouragement and apparent defeat, had to battle to keep His faith in God.

But just there, perhaps, we part company with Him; we are not sure that we have faith in God. At all events, we have lost that feeling of God's actual comradeship, His personal interest in and presence with us, which was so strong in childhood. If there is something we think should be done, we rely on planning and not on praying. If we are tempted, we do not think of Him who can send a guardian angel to defend us, or stand Himself at our side with flaming sword, but summon up our self-reliance and resolve to keep our self-respect. If we are saddened and disappointed, if life goes

against us and our heart aches, we do not run to a mother-like Deity to be soothed and comforted, but rather say, with Henley:

> Out of the night that covers me,
> Black as the pit from pole to pole,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my unconquerable soul.
>
> In the fell clutch of circumstance
> I have not winced nor cried aloud;
> Under the bludgeonings of chance
> My head is bloody, but unbowed.

But have we lost nothing? We used to be genuinely frightened as children when we were naughty: "Thou, God, seest me." Now, provided nobody finds out, we are not much troubled by secret iniquities. If we had something difficult to do, it was strengthening to feel that an Almighty Partner helped us do it. There was infinite comfort in thinking that a great, kind Heart was touched by all our pains, that a Hand reached down and held us up when we stumbled, that an Ear was always open to receive the confidences we were too shy to give anyone else, and a Father up yonder

understood us as nobody else could. When we walked through a dark place it took the lump out of our throat to hear a Voice whispering, "Fear not; I am with thee."

Perhaps we find ourselves in circumstances where we cannot help praying; and when we actually pray, it does not seem so utterly unreasonable. It is not that we get the things we pray for without effort, but we have a sense of getting Someone who shares the effort with us. And if we keep reading this Book which we regard as a collection of human literature, we discover that there is something in it that inspires us as no other literature. It seems to appeal to us at more points of our complex beings, to fit into every conceivable situation in which we happen to be, to meet us at deeper levels and to raise us to greater heights. Whatever our theory of its inspiration, we feel that this collection of writings inspires us with stronger, wiser, better impulses, principles, purposes than any other book.

If we think often enough of the entirely human Jesus, our admiration grows to adoration. We find ourselves not applauding Him; we bow our heads in reverence.

If we do more than think of Him, if we honestly try to follow Him merely as a man, using His methods in our dealings with men, facing perplexities, suffering, defeat, with His courage and hope, we find ourselves receiving from Him quite inestimable inspiration. We are amazed at the fullness of love, of patience, of bravery, there is in Him. We wonder if His explanation of its source may not after all be correct. Was there really a God, the Father whom He trusted so implicitly as Lord of heaven and earth, in fellowship with Him? If there was, is there such a God still? Is not this the most reasonable explanation of the sense of companionship which we find when we are driven to pray?

And if there be such a Father, must He not have wished to speak with His children—must He not have spoken? And are not these inspirations which come to us from the Bible His word through those who best understood Him? To be sure, that word came through entirely human experiences, through men who were often imperfect and mistaken, but however it came it does inspire us now. "As the appearance of the bow

that is in the cloud in the day of rain," so is the appearance round about the Bible. Light streams from it—a completely human book with all the defects inevitable in what men do, but through the human the divine, the word of God.

And if there be such a Father, must He not have wished to give His children a correct likeness of Himself? When we feel constrained to adore Jesus, are we idolaters, or is He the expression of God in a human life? When we draw on His fullness and discover unsearchable riches, is it not because in Him we find the embodiment of God's character? Is it not because He, like God, is love? We are not looking for divinity now in the extraordinary and unhuman things about Him, we are finding His humanity divine, His complete manhood, in which He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, His very Godhood. Taking Him as a man, and nothing more than a man, we are constrained to place Him upon the throne of our lives as our ideal, the Master we cannot but obey. And as we obey the Man, there is "a brightness round about Him." We say: "If I ever worship a God,

He must be the duplicate of this Man. A God unlike Him I refuse to worship, because I know a diviner than He." If we accept Jesus' own thought of His Father we find that Father's character reproduced in Jesus. This man is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah"; and when we see Him we fall upon our faces.

In humanizing our religion we have not lost our God. We exchanged a good fairy for a brother, and in the brother we have discovered our Lord.

So I beheld my God, in childhood's morn,
A mist, a darkness, great and far apart,
Moveless and dim—I scarce could say, Thou art.
My manhood came, of joy and sadness born—
Full soon the misty dark, asunder torn,
Revealed man's glory, God's great human heart.

There is a childhood to be outgrown and a childhood to be grown up to. When once we have become not orphans, however self-reliant, but trusting children, seeing God in the human, in Jesus, and in all that is Jesus-like in any man, we are not quite so eager to label childish all the extraordinary elements in the Bible and about Jesus that

fascinated our childhood's imagination. We lay no emphasis on them. We do not say to any man, "You must believe them"; we say, "You may." We resent the literalist on the one hand, and the rationalist on the other, who would reduce all the poetry of religion to bald prose. The heart of a little child demands that his faith shall have scope for fancy. Of course we do not see in unusual occurrences past or present anything peculiarly Godlike, for the regular and ordinary are equally divine; nor can the unhuman be diviner than the human, for our God has been most fully disclosed in a Man. But we discover that "human" is a much more expansive adjective than we had thought. We come to know men and women who do more and better things than the best fairy we ever heard of. We live with human beings who are as angels of light. We are not troubled with the marvellous in the past; our present is too full of startling surprises; even if these events of long ago are not all to be taken as literal history, they may contain elements of prophecy; they are symbols of faith and hope. We are working and waiting for a day when even Jesus shall be

no longer unique, but when "God shall be all in all."

Meantime we see our God in Jesus. We cannot prove His deity to anybody who does not make Him God by giving Him his entire devotion. And whoever does, needs no proofs. We accord this human Brother all our reverence, all our trust, all our service, and we do not rob His and our Father; for He and the Father are one in purpose. We draw upon Him for what God only can supply, and we are not disappointed. He does all for us God can do, for the Father touches us personally through Him and opens up His unsearchable riches in Him. We live to make Him Lord over all, assured that the loyalty yielded to Him is yielded to the Father to whom He gives back the Kingdom, and that in Him all men, as we, will find the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We do not dehumanize Him; He is first of all and entirely Man; but that does not mean that He is not also the complete revelation of God. When we survey the wondrous cross we see Man at his highest; and that for us is God at His best. "This is the appearance of the likeness of

the glory of Jehovah. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face."

Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

II

RELIGIOUS PREPOSSESSIONS

Hebrews 11:6. He that cometh to God must believe that He is.

This remark seems on the one hand a truism. How can a man approach a God who has no real existence for him? Would anyone think of coming to God unless he thought there were such a Being? What a platitude to tell us that he that cometh to God must believe that He is! And on the other hand it sounds harsh and forbidding. The most earnest believers have their moments of uncertainty. Ours is an odd world, and there are some ugly facts that make God, or at all events the Christian God, appear highly incredible. Even so staunch a man of faith as Luther confessed, "At times I believe and at times I doubt"; and there is a letter of Hugh Latimer to his fellow-martyr Ridley, in which he pleads: "Pardon me and pray for me; pray for me, I say. For I am sometimes so fearful, that

I would creep into a mouse-hole; sometimes God doth visit me again with His comfort. So He cometh and goeth." And in the hour when God is gone, when the mind oscillates between believing that He still exists somewhere and believing that He has never come at all, is there no chance for the heart to go in search of Him through clouds and darkness, if haply there be a God to feel after and find? Is there no place in religion for the prayer, "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul"? There is a rigid exclusiveness in the sentence, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is." Has not our author been too dogmatic?

Let us see what he means.

He does not say, "He that cometh to God must feel that He is a real Being." We know what it is to feel the presence of someone in the room. We know the sensation of loneliness when we are by ourselves; we have a different feeling when we are aware of the other's presence, even if the room be so dark that we cannot see him and he never utters a syllable to us. Many, perhaps all, religious people have times when they sense God's presence exactly as they sense the

presence of a man of flesh and blood. But this vivid realization of the Unseen requires the use of the imagination. Imaginativeness varies in different temperaments, and in the same person at different ages. Santa Claus and fairies are entirely real to some children; they can hear the former up the chimney and fancy the latter in a park on a spring day. If in coming to God we must feel His reality and fancy Him actually present, it is much harder for an adult to come to Him than for a child, and as we grow up we grow away from God.

Further, such feelings, like all feelings, fluctuate. They seldom move on a level plain; their course is over mountains and valleys. The weather, our health, circumstances take them up or down, and lift us to heights where God seems entirely clear and near, or drop us to abysmal depths whence He appears to be utterly excluded.

And even when we feel ourselves in touch with God may it not be merely an imagination? And without consciousness of His existence, may we not be firmly in His hand, living and moving and having our being in Him? Smugly self-righteous people fancy

themselves God's intimates and speak of blessed interviews with Him which are entirely real to them; while their acquaintances are certain that, if there be a God, He has singularly little influence for good upon His chosen, if these be His chosen. And on the other hand, there are some into whose thoughts God never comes, who impress us as the sort of people to whom a good God, if He exists, must be most close.

Faith and feeling, faith and fancy, are not the same thing. Imagination is a vast help to faith. Ruskin said that "an unimaginative person can neither be reverent nor kind." He cannot be kind because it requires imagination to place oneself in another's place and feel what he feels. He cannot be reverent because only he to whom God is vividly actual walks humbly before Him. Let faith fancy, but let us not confuse the two.

Again our author does not say, "He that cometh to God must understand what He is." There are a few exceptional people who reach God headfirst. A leading American theologian of the last generation, Henry B. Smith, said: "My determination

to seek religion was formed solely in consequence of my complete persuasion of its reasonableness. I did not feel any need of it." But there are far more who "stand at the temple door heart in, head out." They may have moods when the sense of an Eternal Beauty, of which all lovely sights are passing gleams, entrances them; or when the consciousness of a mighty and inscrutable Force, back of all the energies active in the universe, awes them; or when a wisdom that baffles their search, an Ultimate Truth behind all the broken fragments of our unrelated notions, tantalizes their minds to go out and explore the unknown for it; or when a Love, controlling all things for good and holding their lives in its gentle embrace, comes upon them as a thought so good they cannot help wishing it true; but as soon as they begin to use their intellects, and explain their mood to themselves, and try to form some image of this Somewhat or Someone Beautiful, Mighty, Wise, Loving, they can gain no clear conception; the mood itself passes, and they find themselves in a world alone with things and people.

It is certainly important that believing people should use their brains, and the clearer the conception we form of the God to whom we are coming the closer will we get to Him, and the more intelligent will be our fellowship. It was a true saying of George Eliot's that "the few may find themselves in the religious life simply by an elevation of feeling; but for us who have to struggle for our wisdom, the higher life must be a region in which the affections are clad with knowledge." It is not enough for us to have a feeling of trust in a Somebody altogether good, so that at times a mood steals over us in which we are uplifted and soothed and inspired; we have to connect that Somebody with the great universe, with human history, with all that is happening about us and with what goes on in our own hearts. And it is in thinking out, or in failing to think out, these connections that God becomes unreal to us.

But let us not make the mistake of trying first to understand what God is and only afterwards coming to Him. We must first touch the shore and land, before we can explore the continent and chart out the

mountains and rivers and plains. We must believe that He is, before we can understand what He is. Faith is the John Baptist that prepares the way for knowledge. We shall always have to be satisfied with a knowledge of God that allows for a huge ignorance about Him. The interior of that Continent it will take us all eternity to chart. But it is quite possible for Him to be inescapably actual to us, an abiding Reality, while we confess, "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

What then does our author mean by faith when he tells us so dogmatically, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is"? He begins this chapter with a definition: "Now faith is the giving substance to things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." Herbert Spencer was right when he said that "prepossession is nine points of belief." Religion starts in us as a hope, a wish. Many men are not infidels who ought to be; they do not really wish for a Christian God. If this were actually His world; if success be attainable only by doing His will, and if the only success attainable be the kind He Himself seeks, they would be very dis-

satisfied and unhappy. The joy of Jesus is not the sort of pleasure they want. The world that would satisfy Jesus would be uncongenial to them. It seems unfortunate that they profess to believe in the existence of the Christian God, because unconsciously they represent Him as being far more like the God they wish than He really is. But have we a prepossession for the Christian God, the God of Jesus Christ? Would we like to think that "of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things," that He is "Lord of heaven and earth"? Would we feel happy to know that this is His world, that all things are working out His purpose, that His will and His will only will eventually be done? Would we enjoy His companionship, prize the chance to share His thoughts, His sympathies, His toil? Do we want Him to be our Father—want Him sufficiently to be willing to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt"; "I must be about my Father's business"; "I do always those things which please Him"? Have we any appetite for this God, a hunger and thirst for His righteousness in ourselves and our world?

Our author was a Christian, and he knew where the hope started of which he was writing. You remember another writer's striking, although often unnoticed, statement to his readers, when, speaking of what they possessed through Jesus, he said, "YOU through Him are believers in God." He does not mean to say that his readers had not believed in some sort of deity before they met Jesus; but through Jesus the hope for His God had been born in them. It is when we see Jesus Christ and appreciate Him, that we cannot help wishing that His faith be not a dream, cannot help hoping that what He believed God to be to Him God actually is. It comes back to our liking or not liking Jesus of Nazareth.

> What think ye of Christ, friend? when all's done and said,
> Like you this Christianity or not?
> It may be false, but will you wish it true?
> Has it your vote to be so if it can?

Richard Hooker, the judicious Elizabethan divine, makes a distinction between the certainty of evidence and the certainty of adherence. The former is the kind of certainty we have after a demonstration,

such as that "a part of anything is less than the whole," while "the other is when the heart doth cleave and stick unto that which it doth believe. This certainty is greater than the other. The reason is this: the faith of a Christian doth apprehend the words of the law, the promises of God, not only as true but also as good; and therefore even when the evidence which he hath of the truth is so small that it grieveth him to feel his weakness in assenting thereto, yet is there in him such a sure adherence unto that which he doth but faintly and fearfully believe, that his spirit having once truly tasted the heavenly sweetness thereof, all the world is not able quite and clean to remove him from it; but he striveth with himself to hope against all reason of believing. For why? this lesson remaineth forever imprinted in him, 'It is good for me to cleave unto God.' "

When a man comes to know Jesus Christ, he is so mastered by Him, that he is forced to declare that it would be the best imaginable thing for himself and for all men, if the faith of Jesus were justified, if His purpose for the world were achievable, if the God in whom He trusted to bring His

purpose to pass be actual. His hope is so compelling that despite all arguments against its possibility he cannot but try to "give substance" to it. He, like Jesus, places himself in trustful sonship with the mysterious Someone who is Lord of all; consecrates his whole heart, soul, mind, strength, to advance the kingdom for which Jesus lived and died; bears, believes, hopes, endures all in the spirit of Jesus; and so tests whether the unseen contains what Jesus believed it contained—a God the duplicate of Jesus Himself in character.

Tests—for so far we have been treating faith as man's wish and God as a man-made picture to which its creators hope there is a corresponding actuality. But many people today think that our Idea of God is the only God there is. Men have imagined a Being perfectly good, according to their highest standards of goodness; and, finding their conception so comforting and exhilarating, have forced themselves to believe it a picture of a reality, while as a matter of fact there is no proof that such a reality exists. But this is to destroy religion. How long would we keep on worshipping an idea of God?

With how much fervor would we serve the projection of our sublimest ideal? Dr. Martineau has well said, "Amid all the sickly talk about 'ideals' which has become the commonplace of our age, it is well to remember that, so long as they are dreams of future possibility and not faiths in present realities, so long as they are a mere self-painting of the yearning spirit, and not its personal surrender to immediate communion with an Infinite Perfection, they have no more solidity or steadiness than floating air-bubbles, gay in the sunshine, and broken in the passing wind. You do not so much as touch the threshold of religion, so long as you are detained by the phantoms of your thought: the very gate of entrance to it, the moment of its new birth, is the discovery that your gleaming ideal is the everlasting Real, no transient brush of a fancied angel wing, but the abiding presence and persuasion of the Soul of souls."

They who give substance to their hope and so test it, do they come telling us that their hope is unsubstantial, such stuff as dreams are made on? Do they find no actuality in the unseen meeting and answer-

ing their trust? Does the hand that reaches up for comradeship in the purpose of working righteousness feel about in an empty void, or is it laid hold of and held fast? "Faith is the giving substance to things hoped for, a test, a conviction of things not seen." This Eleventh Chapter of Hebrews is a roster of those who gave substance to their hope and drew from the Invisible such substantial force and wisdom and patience and courage, that through faith they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens." The reality of God is for them an inescapable fact of experience.

> Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
> Is He sure to bless?
> Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs
> Answer, "Yes!"

He that cometh to God must believe that He is to the extent of hoping that He is and being willing to give substance to his hope.

You may recall George Eliot's description of the religion of the unfortunate Hetty in Adam Bede: "Religious doctrines had taken no hold on Hetty's mind: she was one of those numerous people who have had godfathers and godmothers, learned their catechism, been confirmed, and gone to church every Sunday and yet for any practical result of strength in life, or trust in death, have never appropriated a single Christian idea, or Christian feeling." The unreality of God to many of us nominal Christians is due to our failure to appropriate that which we say we think we possess in Him. We never give substance to our hopes. We never venture out for righteousness' sake regardless of consequences in the assurance that God is our Shield, our High Tower, our Deliverer. We never take our most real faults and weaknesses to Him in the confident expectation that He will rid us of our iniquities and make His strength perfect in our weakness. We do not turn to Him in our perplexities and, spreading out our tangled and bewildered thoughts before Him, let the light of His face shine full on them to

show us the way out. We do not let God be God to us; and then we bemoan His unreality! "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

And yet this is not quite all. There have been men who were willing to give substance to their hope, to whom there seemed to come nothing when they reached up for God. Augustine confesses: "In my thoughts of Thee, Thou wert not any solid or substantial thing to me. For Thou wert not Thyself, but a phantasm. If I attempted to discharge my burden thereon, that it might find rest, it sank into emptiness, and came rushing down again upon me, and I remained to myself an unhappy spot, where I could neither stay nor depart from." Many others to whom God has been at times an undeniable reality go through seasons when all sense of His existence leaves them, when He seems totally intangible. Have we not all passed over considerable stretches of life in which we were haunted by this feeling of the unreality of that which before had been our dominant conviction? If to come to God

we must believe that He is, it seems to require of us an heroic act of make-believe.

Happily at this lowest level we are met by One who assures us of His entire familiarity with our experience and has Himself been in our plight. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" the cry goes up from Him to whom usually God was most actual. And in the very words He utters He shows us not only His complete understanding of our case but the way out from this sense of the unreality of God. Even in His abandonment Jesus still hopes for God, and hopes enough to go directly to God as though He were and plead, "My God." So many of us think to ourselves or talk to others about God's unreality without going straight to God Himself and asking Him why He fails us. Real religion consists not in thinking about God but in dealing personally with Him. Fénelon, the great French preacher, dared to write a correspondent, "If God bores you, tell Him that He bores you." Jesus has that certainty of adherence that makes it impossible for Him to give God up, even when He feels that God has given Him up.

He cannot but cleave to a God who is too good a hope to Him to be considered an illusion. "My God, My God!"—and as Jesus gave substance to His unconquerable hope, He tested and obtained a conviction of things not seen. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible. From the seemingly empty space there came to Him that which transformed this defeated and dying Man into the world's most living Personality, which rendered this God-forsaken but God-seeking Believer the Author and Perfecter of the faith of ten thousand times ten thousand out of every kindred and tribe and tongue and nation who through Him are believers in God and are more and more subduing the world into His Kingdom.

III

THE FINALITY OF JESUS

Revelation 22: 13. I am the Omega.

The book in which these words are ascribed to Jesus was written by a Jew of the Jews, whose mind was saturated with the thought and literature of his people, to whom the religion of his race, belief in one righteous God, was a passion, and the ascription of divinity to any other than the one God abhorrent blasphemy; but such is the impression Jesus of Nazareth had made upon him, that he places Him side by side with God on the throne, and puts upon His lips the identical words (taken from an Old Testament Scripture), which he puts upon the lips of God: "I am the Omega, the Last, the End." This Jew voiced the conviction of primitive Christendom, the conviction of those who stood closest to Jesus Himself, and became His most intelligent and sympathetic interpreters. And he expresses the faith of all of us who, since

his time, and today, have come under the redeeming control of the personality of Jesus. The Jesus we obey, love and worship is for us final. Our consciences, our spiritual experiences, hear Him asserting, "I am the Omega."

On what does our conviction rest?

1. Jesus is for us the complete revelation of the character of God. He reveals God in two ways, through what God was to Him, and through what He Himself was.

(1) Through what God was to Him. No one can come near the Jesus of history without feeling that He is in closest touch with the God of His race, whom He habitually thinks of as "Father, Lord of heaven and earth"; with whom He is on terms of affectionate intimacy, and to whom He speaks with adoring reverence, "Hallowed be Thy name!" We constantly catch from His lips expressions which show that He is thinking of this unseen Companion's attitude towards people, and letting that attitude determine His own. "He is kind to the unthankful and the evil"; the peacemakers are the children who most resemble their divine Father; He cares for the incom-

petent, "the little ones," "the lost," "the least"; He forgives every son who returns to Him, but only sons who as freely forgive their brothers can receive His forgiveness. Jesus abides in His Father's love, does what He sees His Father doing, works as His Father has been and still is working, feels that the Father in closest partnership with Him doeth His works.

There have been, and there are today, other men to whom God is a most real and a most dear Being. They look to Him for guidance, count on His assistance in every right endeavor, bring their sins to Him for forgiveness, rest in Him for comfort and hope, enlist in His purpose, and feel themselves strong in His strength. But we know of no other in all history to whom God has been exactly what He was to this Son. We speak of the God of Abraham, and see in that patriarch a noteworthy pioneer in the religious life of mankind; of the God of Moses, and feel that this revered lawgiver and his successors saw deeply into the will of the Most High for the national life of their people; of the God of the prophets, and acknowledge that these inspired preach-

ers of righteousness penetrated far into the secrets of the Spirit, and brought from their explorations priceless discoveries of the justice, kindness and faithfulness of Jehovah; of the God of the psalmists, and ascribe to the sweet singers of Israel a communion with the King of glory, the Lord of hosts, the Shepherd of Israel, their refuge and strength, their light and exceeding joy, their high tower and fortress, their dwelling-place in all generations, which enables them to voice the thirst of our souls for the living God, and, to a large extent, to express the satisfaction of that thirst in language we shall never wholly outgrow. And outside the boundaries of Israel we recognize that there have been many elect spirits who have been guides and inspirations to their fellows in their quest for the Lord and Deliverer and Comrade of their souls. We would not disparage a Buddha, a Confucius, a Socrates, a Mohammed, or any other to whose conscience righteousness was precious, and to whose soul the unseen was not void. But the God and Father of Jesus is for us a distinctive conception, which eclipses them all, which satisfies our

religious aspirations as no one of the others, and which appears to include all that is of worth in them. When we wish to find God and enter into friendship with Him, we go not to a number of teachers, getting whatever we can from each and combining it all into a universal religion of our own compilation; but we go to One, feeling that He sums up all that we need in our thought of God, saying, "Lord, Thou knowest the Father, and we would learn of Thee." It may seem ungracious in us to say to representatives of other faiths, "We have really nothing to learn of you." It is well for us to study every sincere conviction of any man, well for us to listen respectfully while he tells us what his faith means for him and his fellow believers; but we cannot admit that he has anything needed to supplement the religion of Jesus. "No man knoweth the Father save the Son." "I am the Omega."

(2) Nor is this all. We Christians, starting with the God of Jesus, the God to whom He prayed, and whom He trusted, obeyed, loved, adored, find that God disclosed in Jesus Himself. To quote the words of a cultured woman, a Jewess by

birth, spoken with great earnestness a few weeks ago: "I have become convinced that there is nothing I can think of in the character of God, which I do not find in Jesus; and nothing that I want a God for, which Jesus does not do for me."

It is easy to spin with our thought a philosophical conception of God as the absolute, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and so on, and, failing to see the fulfillment of these speculative conceptions in the historic Jesus, deny His deity. No one claims that Jesus was the complete revelation of the intellect of God, or of His æsthetic nature, or of His multitudinous relations with the universe. But when we come to character, to what God really *is*, if we agree with Jesus that God is long-suffering, forgiving, redeeming, self-giving love, there is nothing we can think of in God that we do not possess in Jesus. We say to Him, as the psalmist to Jehovah: "Thou art my Lord, I have no good beyond Thee." We look at Jesus in all His relations with men, and supremely when He hangs on the cross, and we are compelled to confess, "Behold our God! That is what we mean

by the word, 'God.'" In Jesus dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. What more can there be?

> Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
> More than all in Thee I find.

In the unveiling of the character, the purpose, the heart, the will of Him, whom we adore as God over all, Jesus is the Omega.

2. He is the complete revelation of man's life with God and with his fellow men, which are not two things, but one, for, according to Jesus, no man is rightly adjusted to God who is not rightly adjusted to his brother.

Jesus is not for us a heavenly Being masquerading on earth in human disguise. If He is absolutely one with God in purpose, heart of His heart and life of His life, He is as entirely one with us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, "made in all points like unto His brethren." He is limited in knowledge and limited in power. There are many things which He does not know, many things which He cannot do. He is a man of His age, the first century, with the world-view and science, and even much of the

theology, of His contemporaries, believing, for instance, that certain types of disease were due to demons, as was commonly believed in that day. He is a man of His race, a Jew, with the inheritance and language and forms of thought and intense patriotism of His people. He is a Galilean village carpenter, and His culture and training and connections are those of His class and position. Spiritually He is akin to us, with no immunities from pain and evil which we do not possess, "tempted in all points like as we are," now elated, now depressed, now conscious of God's presence, now feeling Himself utterly forsaken. He is our Brother.

But this human, limited, uncultured, tempted Man has been looked up to for these nineteen centuries as the ideal which forever baffles approximation, as the embodiment of the spirit which every right-minded man covets for himself and seems never able altogether to attain. Mr. Higginson reports an interesting conversation between Emerson and Whittier. The former had remarked that the world had not yet seen the highest development of manhood.

"Does thee think so?" said Whittier. "I suppose thee would admit that Jesus Christ is the highest development our world has seen?"

"Yes, yes, but not the highest it will see."

"Does thee think the world has yet reached the ideals the Christ has set for mankind?"

"No, no, I think not."

"Then is it not the part of wisdom to be content with what has been given us, till we have lived up to that ideal? And when we need something higher, Infinite Wisdom will supply our needs." That is a cautious statement that in manhood Jesus is the Omega so far.

And in a world which we have come to think of as in process of evolution morally, each age surpassing its predecessor in its standards of duty, its conceptions of man's obligations to man in home and industry and commerce and government, its charities and sympathies, is it not a marvel that for all these growing centuries one Figure should tower aloft like a giant Alp, in comparison with whom the loftiest seem but foothills?

You remember Sidney Lanier's exquisite lines to the race's prophetic poets:

Ye companies of governor-spirits grave,
Bards, and old bringers-down of flaming news
From steep-wall'd heavens, holy malcontents,
Sweet seers, and stellar visionaries, all
That brood about the skies of poesy,
Full bright ye shine, insuperable stars;
Yet, if a man look hard upon you, none
With total lustre blazeth, no, not one
But hath some heinous freckle of the flesh
Upon his shining cheek, not one but winks
His ray, opaqued with intermittent mist
Of defect; yea, you masters all must ask
Some sweet forgiveness, which we leap to give.

And then he runs over a list of earth's famous teachers, pointing out some imperfection in each, and at length turns from them all and concludes:

But Thee, but Thee, O sovereign Seer of time,
But Thee, O poets' Poet, Wisdom's Tongue,
But Thee, O man's best Man, O love's best Love,
O perfect life in perfect labor writ,
O all men's Comrade, Servant, King, or Priest,—
What "if" or "yet," what mole, what flaw, what lapse,
What least defect or shadow of defect,
What rumor tattled by an enemy

Of inference loose, what lack of grace
Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's,—
Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, good Paragon, Thou Crystal Christ.

We have no hesitancy in going to Jesus for the final solution of any problem which may arise in connection with man's relations to the Unseen, or with his most practical relations with his fellows. We do not think of Jesus as tentative and temporary, as affording us the best guidance up to date, but ultimately to be surpassed or superseded. We take the most complicated questions of our age—race problems, the attitude of the white man to the yellow and the brown, of the black to the white, of Gentile to Jew and of Jew to Gentile; industrial perplexities, the legitimacy of competition as a motive in business, the relations of employer and employee, the proportion of profits due to capital and labor respectively, the rights of the property owner and the rights of workers to employment; political questions, free trade or protection, more or no battleships, the obligations of society to the criminal; social questions, race-track gambling—Is a horse

of more value than a man?—the drink traffic, its regulation or prohibition; the social evil in the narrower sense, with its hideous roll of victims in every so-called Christian city, a moral plague far more loathsome and unnecessary than the pestilences of the Middle Ages which our medical men look back on as completely eradicable evils;—we take them all to Jesus, certain that His spirit, if seriously and conscientiously applied to them, will infallibly lead to an ultimate solution. We do not expect to find our questions answered in so many words in the teaching of Jesus. Obviously many of these problems were not within His horizon. And were the answer thus given us, we should be dealt with as babies, not as sons and daughters with minds of our own, who, once given a principle, can be trusted to think out its application for themselves. But the principle, the controlling spirit has been given in Him, and we are confident that the spirit of Jesus is adequate to guide us to such a solution that, if we obey, we shall find the Kingdom of God coming, and at length see His will done in earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is the Omega.

3. But even this is not all. Jesus is more than the complete revelation of the character of God, and of the life of man with God and his fellows. Those who attempt to sum up Christianity by quoting Jesus' summary of the Jewish Law, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself," need to be reminded that He was merely answering the question, "What is the essence of Judaism?" not "What is the sum of all religion?" Jesus claimed to be an innovator as well as a fulfiller. "A new commandment give I unto you," an early follower interprets Him as saying. "This is My commandment that ye love one another even as I have loved you." "*Even as I*"—the most important contribution Jesus made to the world was just Himself. Judaism had said, "Ye shall be holy, for I Jehovah, your God, am holy"; and Jesus had repeated and interpreted it, "Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful." But how is God holy, how is He merciful? The Christians hear Jesus answering, "Even as I." There is His own divinity, and further we are at once led to Calvary.

"Hereby know we love," say the primitive Christians, "because He laid down His life for us."

And the important thing is that they are compelled at once to complete the sentence by adding: "And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Had Jesus come, like the Old Testament prophets or like John the Baptist, merely to reform Judaism, to distinguish the important from the unimportant elements in the Law, Christianity would have been nothing distinctive. Jesus would have been a repetition and interpretation of Moses, and His movement a sect of reformed Jews. But why is it that a religion which, up till Jesus, had been a tribal, a national, a racial affair with a few proselytes, and has remained such ever since, only with far fewer proselytes today than in the first century, suddenly, after Jesus, becomes a world-conquering power? The only explanation is that the personality of Jesus, and that personality as disclosed supremely on the cross, had brought a new and well-nigh irresistible force. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel," wrote a Hebrew of Hebrews, who had known the highest

inspiration which the most vigorous and earnest form of the faith of his fathers could furnish, and had found it inadequate, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." So soon as a man comes under the control of the spirit of Jesus he is possessed by an overmastering impulse: "The love of Christ contraineth me." He is conscious of a supply of energy adequate for anything: "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." Ask the men and women, who in every Christian century have been ready to hazard their lives on mission fields, to give themselves to the care of the sick, the leper, the victims of disease or of social wrong—yes, ask any one of us Christians here, what is the most forceful inspiration we know of, and we point with Paul to a scene in the past, where outside a city wall a dearly loving and now dearly loved Man is nailed to a cross. We say that in Him we see unveiled the very heart of Him, of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things, and are moved to live no longer unto ourselves, but unto Him who

for our sakes died, and has risen again, and is the present controlling power in us. A well-known British journalist watched the Passion Play at Oberammergau and came away saying to himself: "This is the story that has transformed the world," and he seemed to hear an echo, "Yes, and will transform it."

Jesus is not merely Revealer to us, but Redeemer; not only the unveiling of the ideal for ourselves and for all men, but the inspiration to achieve it. It is because we have discovered in Him the mightiest force of which we are aware, a force whose potencies we never seem to exhaust, that we are driven to confess that He is the Omega.

Were Jesus any less to us than final He could not enlist all our loyalty and command our entire consecration. But we feel that there is no possible limit to the devotion we owe Him.

> Had I a thousand hearts to give,
> Lord, they should all be Thine.

He draws from us *all* the reverence, *all* the confidence, *all* the adoration, *all* the self-

dedication of which we are capable. We have no more for God Himself, and therefore Jesus is for us God, the embodiment of God's character and the transmitter of God's life. In harmony with Jesus we feel that there remains no further attainment; we are at one with the purpose of Him, whose are sun and moon and stars of light. If it be idolatry to worship any but God alone, we are either idolaters or Jesus is for us as God. Because He claims and gains our utmost, we cannot but call Him "The Omega."

Feeling thus towards Jesus, is it possible for us to imagine for a moment that we are acting as brothers towards any man, however good, who lacks this experience of the power of Christ, if we do not seek to impart it to him? In a recent controversy over the use of Christian hymns in the public schools, a prominent Jewish paper said in an editorial, "Scratch a Christian anywhere and you find a missionary." That is inevitable. Scratch a man without finding in him a missionary, and you can be certain that you have not found a Christian. If the best of men who does not share our faith in

Jesus points to a noble religious creed and a high standard of conduct, and asks, "What would you convert me to?" we answer without hesitation, "To Jesus Christ: to the authority of His religious experience, to God as revealed in Him, to the transforming power of obedience to His spirit, to unreserved consecration to His purpose." If a man pleads that his religion is bound up with his very being, that to forsake it will upset his entire life, tear him up from the roots, as the Brahman does in India, as the Jew with us, we can only answer: "There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all and in all." "He that loveth caste or race, father or mother, son or daughter, yea, his own life, more than Me is not worthy of Me. I am the Omega."

Let us not be unjust or ungenerous to any man. Let us gladly acknowledge that the Spirit of God, which is for us the Spirit of Jesus, controls many who have no conviction of Jesus' finality, and no sense of personal loyalty to Him. Let us rejoice in all that makes for righteousness and see

in its workers allies for the Kingdom of God. Jesus had no sympathy with the disciples who saw one casting out a demon and forbade him because he was not a fellow follower with them. "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us, is for us."

At the same time let us not minimize what the best and most useful of men without personal attachment to Jesus lacks. There is a world of difference between Saul of Tarsus as a disciple of one of the broadest and most spiritual of non-Christian teachers, and Paul the servant of Jesus Christ. He has a new light—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"; a new power—"I labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily"; a new peace—"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," guards his "heart and thoughts in Christ Jesus"; a new joy—"Most gladly will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong"; a new inextinguishable and triumphant

hope—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us." Saul of Tarsus was one of the most conscientious and earnest of men, while he lived by the highest standards the faith of his fathers had to offer; and it is difficult to see how the forces latent in that faith alone could have transformed him, impossible to see how they could have made him the man he became. "But if any man is in Christ," no matter how excellent before, "there is a new creation"; and the new creation justifies his and our faith in the finality of the new Creator. "I am the Omega."

Gentlemen, is Jesus actually final for you and me? Do we bring our questions of right and wrong, expedient and inexpedient, thoughtfully to Him, and let His Spirit control our decisions? Do we turn to Him as the all-sufficient source of strength with which to confront life's ordeals, shoulder its responsibilities, triumph in its sorrows, and fight through its battle? Do we place at

His disposal all that in us is, even to the very last particle of our ability, our resources, our energy, our love? Are we prepared to do our utmost to make Him Lord of all, even of the last man in the ultimate spot on God's earth?

"Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

IV

ABILITIES SUICIDALLY USED

1 Samuel 31:4. Saul took his sword, and fell upon it.

This act was typical of Saul's entire career. He was constantly taking the weapons placed in his hand for service and using them to destroy himself.

He is Samuel's choice for the kingship, and from that eventful night when the old prophet talked to him on the housetop, Samuel was prepared to stand by him as his trusted counsellor and vigorous supporter. Saul had the chance to disabuse the old man tactfully of any prejudices he had against the new régime, and through him to gain the hearty adherence of the more religious element among the people who reverenced their old leader; but in a very little while he alienates Samuel's sympathy and forces him to denounce him. A son is given him whose prowess in battle and popularity with the people render him a great source of strength to the supremacy of his royal

house. What more desirable heir apparent could a king ask than Jonathan? But when he unintentionally breaks a command of his father's at Beth-aven, Saul would have put him to death, had not public sentiment compelled him to revoke his sentence. David is brought to his court and attaches himself to the king with warm affection and loyalty. With his abilities as a warrior and leader, and his growing reputation, what an addition he is to Saul's strength. But the king jealously quarrels with him and drives him into exile; and, despite David's repeated attempts at reconciliation, he refuses to take him back. The kingship itself was his glorious opportunity to become the first monarch of a mighty line and leave a permanent impress upon the life of the nation; but he could not stand power, and his exalted station proves his undoing, and sets him in the list of the world's conspicuous failures. It seems as though God had again and again placed in his grasp a sword with which to win a victory and each time he had turned its point against himself and fallen on it. It is a true description of his career to say that he killed himself.

And Saul's experience is unhappily so common. Education is one of the most effective equipments for service. A trained mind is a sword worth years of patient grinding to acquire and constant sharpening to keep in readiness for instant use. When one reads the heroic struggles of poor boys to get any sort of schooling and their enormous sacrifices to purchase books, one wonders why many of us hold so lightly the advantages offered us and do such pitiably little reading that adds anything to our mental enrichment. But education sometimes seems to give people something which they not only do not use, but which actually is in the way of their usefulness, like a great unwieldy sword over which they constantly trip and fall. We have present-day analogies to Pope's

> Bookful blockhead, ignorantly read
> With loads of learned lumber in his head.

Education ought to render its possessors eager to place their skilled intellects at the service of their less endowed brothers, but too often college graduates use their training solely to help them to selfish successes

in profession or business, or for their own amusement as dilettantes. Public spirit is by no means the invariable characteristic of college men and women. Their acquisitions are implements to gratify personal ambition or to minister to self-indulgence, for it is quite as possible to indulge and pamper the mind as the body. And education often estranges men from their less fortunate fellows. Their own cleverness makes them intolerant and scornful of stupidity and dullness. Their bookish point of view puts them out of sympathy with plain people whose entire library is the book of common life. Seldom do we find an educated man, however much he may wish to, who can see things with the eyes and thoughts of the uncultivated, speak out his mind and heart in language they understand, and get so close to them that they do not feel that his superior mind is a barrier between them. The weapon placed in our hand for service actually proves the destruction of our usefulness.

Or take culture, the development of good taste in music, art, literature, the refinement of manners, good breeding, delicacy of feel-

ing. We recognize that this is something much to be prized and hard to acquire for any not to the manner born. Instinctively we detect the difference between those who possess and those who lack it. It is a ticket of admission which enables its fortunate holder to enter the best society of the past and the present, to appreciate nature, books, pictures, architecture, people. And besides the incalculable enrichment which it confers to the man's own life, it ought to fit him to be the interpreter of things true and honorable and gentle and lovely to his less fortunate fellows. But how frequently it has the opposite effect! A finely cultivated taste offers so many chances for exquisite enjoyment that it is perilously easy to live entirely for self-gratification. A sensitive appreciation of beauty spontaneously recoils from all that is unlovely. Coleridge said of Dorothy Wordsworth: "Her taste is a perfect electrometer. It bends, protrudes and draws in at subtlest beauties and most recondite faults." And with such a delicate organ it is all too easy to seek to banish from one's thoughts the unpleasant, the coarse, the sickening; to surround oneself with

agreeable people; to give oneself to congenial occupations; and to live a somewhat tame and artificial and useless life within a high-walled, formal garden. Culture ought to broaden its happy possessors; but how many pitifully narrow cultured people we all know! Their much-vaunted good taste often degenerates into that which Dickens caricatured in Mrs. General, whose refined mind would dwell on nothing that was not perfectly proper, placid and pleasant. And as for religion, one would expect that a mind cultivated to see and respond to beauty and goodness would leap up the instant it caught sight of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But conversions are exceedingly rare among cultivated people. It may be that too few ministers and teachers know how to present the King in His beauty, so that He appears as the altogether Lovely; but people of culture are usually sophisticated, and from the beginning babes have seen things hidden from the wise and prudent. And again it is not good form to become wildly enthusiastic about anything, and men arrive at God with a blazing passion for His Kingdom and His righteous-

ness, or they do not arrive at all. And, above all, that which appreciates God is love—not admiration, not good taste, but the love that goes out in selfless service; and culture makes so many of its devotees self-centred. You remember Tennyson's "Palace of Art," to which he prefixed the lines:

> I send you here a sort of allegory—of a soul,
> A sinful soul, possessed of many gifts,
> A spacious garden full of flowering weeds,
> A glorious devil, large in heart and brain,
> That did love beauty only—beauty seen
> In all varieties of mould and mind.

And then he draws the picture of the life that banishes the disagreeable, the disgusting, the terrible elements of human existence, and lives in its exclusive palace with all things fair; and its self-culture becomes a sword that pierces it.

> And he that shuts Love out, in turn shall be
> Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
> Howling in outer darkness.

Or take wealth. It is nonsense to talk slightingly of means and to cry up poverty. It may be that we shall have the poor with

us always; but that does not mean that poverty is ever anything but an evil, and an evil we are bound to battle to destroy. A fair share for everyone in God's bountiful heritage is a Christian ideal. And wealth is a tool with which one can accomplish vast things for the Kingdom of God. Paul tells us that we are to labor to have to give. But with a great many people their wealth is the most serious impediment to their usefulness. Because they possess a certain income, they feel constrained to live up to it. They really must have this and that, and do thus and so. If without this and that, and ceasing to do thus and so, they could invest their lives more profitably, it is a great shame that the conventions of wealth should be allowed to stand in their way. Leaders in churches and philanthropic organizations know very well that one can seldom count upon a person of means for reliable, continuous personal service. Because they can afford to go here and there, to gratify this and that desire, to enjoy the country, or experience the delight of travel, or go in for some time-consuming sport, they are apt to do it, and to feel that

a subscription which enables others to do good works excuses them from self-giving. Their means which should be a sword with which they personally take the field becomes the destroyer of their self-sacrifice.

And (to mention swords that we seldom think of as instruments of suicide) take goodness, integrity of character. To be known as entirely trustworthy, to be respected as honorable, just and faithful, is to be capable of the largest service of God and man. But some of the least attractive people you and I know are thoroughly trustworthy. The men who crucified Jesus were, for the most part, good men, honorable and faithful to a degree. People who are not altogether honorable and not at all reliable are sometimes more sympathetic than the righteous. It is hard to be just without becoming somewhat harsh, to be uncompromisingly honest without ceasing to be tender, to be straight without growing narrow. The effort to be good renders many men austere and hard. It is a question whether the greater evil is wrought in the world by the scamps and rascals or by the good people, whose goodness is of a

rigid and disagreeable variety. Many a man's righteousness has spoiled his sympathy and shut him off from helping those who most needed him. And it is not without significance that Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners." Self-respect takes the place in many persons which a craving for God should occupy. So long as they are conscious of living up to their lights and doing the best they can, they feel no need of God. Their very goodness, which is not spurious but genuine so far as it goes, makes them impervious to the appeals of the Gospel. That which stands in the way of their becoming better is not their badness, but their goodness. They are falling on their own swords.

Or take religion. A vigorous faith in God is unquestionably the mightiest weapon which a human hand can grasp. By faith obstacles are vanquished, wildernesses turned into springs of water, waste lives redeemed. And surely, we think, religion can never hurt anybody. But unfortunately it can. The unseen becomes very absorbing to those who love God, and they easily grow careless of their small obligations to

the seen. Religious people are often inconsiderate and thoughtless. They are deeply impressed with the gracious forgiveness of God and rejoice that He washes them whiter than snow, but this may weaken their consciences, and their assurance of free forgiveness allow them to sin with greater impunity. Companionship with God ought to make conscience more sensitive, but devout people are not conspicuous for the fineness of their sense of honor or their scrupulous regard for truth. The fact that a man prays does not guarantee the amiability of his disposition, the control of his temper, or the gentleness of his tongue. Religious people look at life in the light of eternity, and unfortunately this may have the effect of dulling their sense of the importance of what they are and do today. Genuine faith in God has been associated at some time or other with almost every diabolical characteristic in human nature one can mention. In Saul's own case there was no lack of religion. The difficulty was that he thought that by being devout he could compound for disregarding the difficult policy of the rigorously righteous

Samuel. He would offer a sacrifice, and that would excuse him for keeping a good share of the booty of his raid on Agag; and he had to learn the bitter lesson that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." His thought of God, his feeling that he could make things right with Him, proved a sword upon which he fell and slew himself.

One contrasts with the tragic death of Saul another Old Testament suicide. Blind Samson grasps the pillars of the temple of Dagon and crying, "Let me die with the Philistines!" pulls the building upon himself and the oppressors of his people. It forms a heroic ending which redeems the man's misspent life; while Saul's is the ignoble climax of his well-nigh unbroken failure. Had he but shouted, "Let me sell my life as dearly as I can!" and rushed upon the Philistines, we should have felt him a true king even in his defeat and disaster. But there is a difference between the two men. Samson did not care what happened to him so long as he slew the foes of his people. Saul could not get his mind off himself. "Draw thy sword," he said to his

armor-bearer, "and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me." One is reminded of the death of a far baser man. Nero exclaims, "Qualis artifex pereo," posing at least to himself even in death. Saul cannot help thinking of what is due to his own dignity. If he had cared only for the kingdom over which God had set him and for the people whose battle he was fighting, it would have made no difference to him whether a Philistine javelin or an Israelite's sword smote him. But his pride, his self-importance, rose up and obscured his consecration. It had been his self-will which led to the rupture with Samuel, his offended feeling that brought him to sentence Jonathan, his pique that induced him to banish the popular David. Self had been Saul's lifelong foe. It was the evil spirit that troubled him. He could not forget himself, lose himself, and he ends self-slain.

Education, culture, wealth, righteousness, religion—and we might have lengthened the list indefinitely—influence, friendliness, love, popularity, what not?—are all swords

of service, but swords which self-interest will turn into weapons of suicide. Very few men think of the knowledge of which Paul speaks when he writes, "I know how to abound." We spend a great deal of time in learning how to get, but never think of the need of learning how to have. Paul had learned his lesson in the school of Him, who having all things, being in the form of God, emptied Himself. It is only the man who is possessed by an engrossing interest, by devotion to some Israel for whom God makes him responsible, who can have weapons of service and wield them to the destruction of the enemies of the Kingdom of love. We, within the walls of Battell Chapel this morning, represent a splendid equipment in brains, in refinement, in means, in character, in faith, but it is all too possible that the points of our God-given swords are turned towards our own breasts and that we are falling on the very weapons given us for divinest use.

You remember that Samuel had tried to fire Saul's imagination, that night years before on the housetop, with the vision of what he might mean to the tribes of Israel,

and that the spirit of patriotic fervor, the public spirit, came on him when he met the band of leaping enthusiasts, and people said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" But their questioning way of saying it tells the story. He was, but not wholly. What of ourselves? Is there any hesitancy in people's thoughts where to classify us?

Never mind people; their judgments are after all too inaccurate to waste our thought on. Where do we classify ourselves? We want to be useful in God's service, to be warriors of the Kingdom of righteousness. The prophetic fire burns here; we feel its heat every now and again. But how entirely does it consume us? Are we flinging all our heart, soul, mind, strength, into the Kingdom, or have we side-interests—things which we feel we have a right to get out of our education, our culture, our wealth, our reputation, our faith, whether they bear directly on the cause of God or not? That way lies suicide. For whosoever would save his life—save his intellectual enjoyment or save his clever power to mould men to his will, save his own sensitive refinement from contact with the

unpleasant, save the comfort and indulgence that his wealth affords irrespective of its hindrance of his personal service—he who would save anything for himself shall lose it. Saul saved the doubtful glory of killing himself, instead of letting his last strength go out in attempting to fell another Philistine; and his foes cut off his head, stripped his corpse and hung his body in public shame on the wall of Beth-shan, and his memory is displayed as a pathetic failure before the eyes of all the ages.

But how is a man to lose himself? No one can do it by trying to. The harder we try, the more self-conscious we become. Saul came nearest to forgetting himself when he was with Samuel and his fellow enthusiasts. They nearly succeeded in getting him wrapped up in the cause of his people. And we have One whose consecration is far more compelling than theirs. When a man catches sight of Jesus Christ, if there is anything inflammable in his make-up, it takes fire. That for which Jesus lived and died masters him. He cannot explain the fascination; he does not stop to try to explain it; he goes headlong. For him to live is

Christ. What Jesus wished to accomplish, what He believed we with God can accomplish, becomes an obsession. "The love of Christ constraineth us." The cross lifts us clean out of ourselves. Love so amazing, so divine, not only demands, but has power to enforce its demand for soul, life, all. Whenever self with its persistent pleas for recognition troubles us, our safety lies in running to Calvary. We lose self in the presence of the Crucified. We cannot help it. There is in Him, as He pours out His soul unto death, an irresistible persuasion. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's," and the swords in our hands become the swords of our God and of His Christ, weapons through which we bring all things into subjection to Him.

Some here today are like Saul on the housetop with their whole careers still ahead of them. God grant that Jesus Christ may lay His spell on them and rid them of self from the start. Others of us are more like Saul at Gilboa with a long list of occasions behind us when self-regard or self-pity or

self-concern or self-conceit has made us use our swords of service to our own hurt. But He who is able to save unto the uttermost can on the final battlefield, when the cause seems wholly lost, make us sharers of His wish, His enthusiasm, His sacrifice, and as we raise the sword resolved to hit at least one blow for God regardless of what happens to us, He will make us more than conquerors over self and the world.

V

THE CLAIMS OF THE CHURCH UPON CHRISTIANS

John 20: 21, 22. Jesus said to them, As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' commission to His first disciples we get a clear definition of the Christian Church. It is the company of those who share the purpose of Jesus and possess His Father's Spirit for its accomplishment.

Protestantism has so emphasized the individual's personal fellowship with God, that it has often lost sight of his necessary fellowship with the Church, the communion of those of like purpose organized for collective service. We need to remind ourselves that, unique as was Jesus' relation to God, He was a loyal churchman.

He was born into the Jewish Church, and the first recorded incidents of His childhood—His circumcision and presentation in the Temple—were His public recognition

as a church member. The earliest expression of His own religious experience was His saying to His parents that He must be in His Father's house. That Church was the heir of patriarchs, prophets, lawgivers, psalmists, sages, and of generations of lowly and earnest believing men and women. Two of the evangelists give us genealogies, which interest us today not so much as lines of physical descent but as the ancestry of Jesus' faith. The heritage of the Jewish Church was Jesus' birthright. He expressed His respect for the official leaders of the body which had preserved the choicest religious experiences of the past in its Scriptures, kept alive devotion to the God of Israel in the world, and was holding up, however imperfectly, the ideal of His Kingdom, when He said, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things, therefore, whatsoever they bid you, these observe and do." In that Church's trust His faith was born; in its worship and teaching His soul was shaped and nourished; in its consecration the flame of His own sacrifice was kindled. To it He owed a debt which He never repudiated.

A Christian today is under no less obligation to the Church. Those who stand aloof from it and coolly criticise it, as though they sustained no personal relation to it, are as unfilial as the man who would "peep and botanize upon his mother's grave." There are doubtless some things about the Church with which we cannot sympathize. Its beliefs may appear to us crude at a number of points, and its official creeds phrased in obsolete forms; its standards of conduct may seem deficient in social obligation; its outlook may be narrow, prejudiced and exclusive of much that is not alien to the purpose of the Son of man; its methods may impress us as pathetically ineffective with large sections of our population. The Jewish Church in Jesus' day was lacking in His eyes in all these respects; but the fact remained that it had been His spiritual mother, and this kinship gave Him a responsibility He could not disown.

Again, its fellowship seemed to Him indispensable for His own religious inspiration. The life in which all succeeding generations have seen the fullness of the Godhead was not self-sufficient. Jesus'

originality consisted in His discriminating appropriation of the best He found in existing institutions, ideals, beliefs, and transforming it for His own purpose. He went regularly to the services of the synagogue and kept the appointed festivals at Jerusalem. There must have been many phrases in the prayers of the liturgy which He found imperfect and even objectionable. There were portions of the Church's recognized Scriptures which He considered outworn and inadequate representations of God. He must often have been bored by dull and unenlightened sermons. Some of the Church's leaders did not command His respect, and many of his fellow worshippers must have seemed insincere and uninspiring. But He did not depend upon His own Bible reading and private communion with God for the development of His spirit. The fellowship of kindred souls and the stimulus of social worship were to Him essential for His religious vitality.

Many high-principled Christians do not attend church services and have no formal connection with the organization today. It is undeniable that there are many religious

stimuli besides those that come from public worship and fellowship with the Church—stimuli in literature, in education, in social service; but if the Son of God could not do without inspirations which came to Him from the Jewish Church, it is surely not likely that a modern Christian can maintain his spiritual life at its utmost vigor without constant contact with the Christian Church, which, however faulty, is certainly no faultier than the Church Jesus knew.

And again, Jesus found in the Church the largest opportunity for the investment of His personal religious life. According to Luke's narrative, as soon as He became aware of His special spiritual endowment and had gone through the testing in the wilderness, He returned to the synagogue in which He had been reared, and announced that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. It is in a religious society that a man can find his largest usefulness for the Kingdom. In an organization others will supplement him, catch his zeal, receive his new ideas, spread his influence where he cannot personally go, and carry on the impetus of his life long after he has ceased to be. The

Jewish Church offered Jesus pulpits from which to speak His message, a theology in which to clothe His thoughts, a heritage of spiritual force with which He could ally Himself, a membership of believing people from which He drew His first adherents. He seemed to feel that if He could capture this organization, and get it to adopt His purpose, He would have an incalculable reinforcement. He was disappointed; but whatever success He attained, He won through it.

Where can a man with the purpose of Christ today find a larger opportunity than in the Christian Church? Here is the impetus of the past to forward him; here are lives with kindred faith and devotion to be his partners; here is a wealth of sentiment to which he can appeal; here is conveniently arranged machinery to multiply his effectiveness; here is a body into which he can infuse his spirit, and which will conserve the results of his work long after he has passed away. If he disagrees with its official creeds, let him seek to revise and improve them, as Jesus sought to teach the Church of His age. If he thinks that it is

wasting its energies on trifles, let him recall it to its divine commission, as Jesus set forth to the congregation at Nazareth the purpose of God. If he considers its methods ineffective, let him show it a more excellent way; and the Church, with all its traditionalism, is sincerely eager to be made more efficient. Let him inspire it, by his thought and consecration and sacrifice, with a new spirit, with more of its own spirit—the Eternal Spirit of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. A Christian can do most, not in isolation, but in fellowship with the company of like-purposing believers.

We sometimes wonder that Jesus founded no organization. This was not due, as has been alleged, to His hostility to organization, but to the fact that in the Jewish Church He found such an organization already in existence. He was not primarily interested in polity, or creed, or worship, or methods, but in the spirit and purpose of the Church. If once He could fill it with His Spirit and commit it to His purpose, its government, theology, ritual, methods, would adjust themselves. When it became evident that the Jewish Church, as a whole,

could not be won, He gave Himself to the task of inspiring a small group within it with His mind. The Spirit could be trusted to find a Body of its own in which to gain expression. The sole condition of membership in the New Testament Church was possession of the Spirit of Jesus; and with large local differences in its forms of administration, many varieties of theological opinion and much diversity in worship, it was an effective organization for its divine purpose, compacted by loyalty to Jesus and consecration to His aims.

The Christian Church is the chief agency in our day for the setting up of the Kingdom of God. As such, it has a claim on all who share the purpose of Jesus. A man cannot consistently follow Him, without following Him into the fellowship of the Church.

In its present outwardly disunited condition, Christians do not always recognize the obligation of church membership. Denominationalism may be offensive to them; and they cannot unite with the Church save as they belong to one of the churches. But to serve in one regiment in an army is not to disparage the equal loyalty and useful-

ness of all the other troops, and there is no way of enlisting in an army save by enlisting in some particular branch of the service.

Or a man may feel that no existing communion fulfills his ideal. Let him remain in that in which he was born, to which his obligation is certainly strongest; or, if that seems impossible, let him enter that in which he can work with least friction. If a man is entirely satisfied with any existing church, it is to be hoped that he will not enter it, and if he is in such already, that he will hasten to leave. He will hinder and hamper its advance, and be in matters ecclesiastical that hopeless factor whom in political life we label a "stand-patter."

Nor is there any inconsistency in worshipping and working, or even in occupying a position of leadership, in a communion with whose creed, or ritual, or methods one is not in full sympathy. That was Jesus' condition in the Jewish Church, and a Christian can well be as inconsistent as his Lord. The point is that church membership is not an optional responsibility which a follower of Jesus may or may not assume; he cannot follow his Lord and refuse to contribute the

inspiration of his personality to the social group which is functioning collectively for the Kingdom.

For those of us who are already in the membership of one of the churches this conception of the Church carries a duty to stand for a distinctive type of churchmanship. We must seek to render our communion as inclusive as the Church of Christ, with a welcome and a scope for every follower of Jesus. We must protest against doctrinal tests, or the insistence on a particular type of religious experience, or the emphasis upon conformity to some hallowed rite, that would bar its fellowship to any sincere Christian. We must wage incessant warfare against denominational snobbery, which, while admitting that other churches are Christian, considers one's own a more select company of the spiritually élite. We must stand for Church unity, not by dissociating ourselves from our communion, but by working heartily for the Kingdom of God through it, striving all the while to increase its efficiency by doing away with whatever in its standards, worship or administration prevents any man who is

fit to minister in any church from entering its ministry, or which debars any genuine follower of Jesus from finding a congenial home in its membership. We do not wish to reduce the Church's thought to an impossible agreement, nor its government to a mechanical uniformity, nor its worship to monotonous sameness; this would render it of no value to many temperaments and minds; but to make it include the widest possible differences within a unity of spirit that shall make it function harmoniously and unitedly for its one divine purpose.

There are times when the Church of Christ, as represented in the existing churches, is a heavy cross to faith. In the majority of local churches financial support is an ever-pressing problem, and the organization devotes the largest part of its energies to the often sordid struggle for subsistence. Like all great institutions, the Church is naturally conservative, and gives but a cold welcome to its ablest scholars and keenest thinkers, who offer it new and fuller glimpses of truth; and it has often persecuted its prophets and garnished their sepulchres in a succeeding generation. It

is constantly exposed to the tendency to consider the prejudices of those already within its fellowship, and to adapt its work to suit their tastes, rather than to think primarily of those who are outside and to shape its methods to reach them. As it is composed of average people, it will usually offend the cultured by its crudities and the æsthetic by its lack of taste. Above all, its work, which requires the most spiritually gifted to do it well, has to be entrusted to persons of ordinary, and sometimes considerably less than ordinary, ability; and their lack of inspiration, or intelligence, or tact, or fidelity, pitifully cripples the working Body of Christ. Under such circumstances it is not astonishing that even those who are predisposed to think well of all who work in Christ's name are tempted to ask: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"

But the stream of spiritual vitality in the Church is, nevertheless, the river which makes glad the city of God. What one of our great rivers, a Hudson or a Connecticut, for instance, is to the country through which

it flows, the Church is to human society. The river's more rapid upper reaches turn millwheels and supply power to run factories and to light towns. Its pools are the swimming places of small boys in summer and their skating ponds in winter. In its shallows the cattle stand and cool themselves on torrid days. At intervals its banks are cut and its water deflected to fill canals. Its broader waters bear vessels freighted with merchandise. It sweeps past cities, carrying the filth from their sewers out into the ocean. And all along its course meadows are richer, trees more luxuriant, the whole countryside fairer and more fruitful for its beneficent presence. Such is the Church of God in the world of men. It supplies busy lives with inspiration to do the world's work in the Spirit of Christ. It affords little children their happiest ideals and develops them for their highest service. It rests the tired with its ministry of comfort and renewal. It furnishes devoted workers to innumerable organizations whose work is parallel with its own aims. It supports and carries along lives laden with responsibilities and burdened with oppressive weights. It

cleanses the sinning and purifies the social life, to which it brings the constant flow of its purer standards and more generous spirit. And wherever the Church is, lives that are not in direct touch with it are richer in ideals, fairer in character, and more fruitful in service for its inspiring presence in their neighborhood. There are, doubtless, showers of divine blessing that refresh God's earth everywhere, and dews of mercy that form nightly over the most parched and barren soil; but the Church is the channel through which the central stream of divine life is flowing to fructify the earth with fruits of righteousness akin to those of Jesus.

In every age the Church has felt that the flow of divine life and power in it was a mere trickle; and this is true today. We recognize the Church's mission—to cleanse every sphere of our social life and permeate a whole world with the Spirit of God in Christ. And how titanic the task is! The Church looks expectantly and trustfully to its sons and daughters in the schools and colleges of the land, pleading with them to acknowledge their spiritual debt, to avail

themselves of its stores of garnered and living inspiration, and to bring the wealth of their endowment and energy to augment its forces and fulfill its world-wide mission. And shall it look in vain?

VI

FOOLS FOR A PURPOSE

1 Samuel 21: 10-15. And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish, the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying,

Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?

And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?

This is a curious tale to hand down through the centuries associated with the name of David, the revered founder of Israel's sacred dynasty. It represents the national hero rescuing himself from a

situation where he was under suspicion, not by some devout appeal to God, nor by some act of prowess, but by making a most indecorous fool of himself, and behaving like a raving maniac. One wonders why any historian compiling an edifying account of this great man's career should have included this incident. No public man today would retain a press agent who did not show more discrimination. And when one recalls that Israel's historians are always preachers, recording events not merely or mainly in order to present a complete picture, but to hold up an inspiring ideal, what possible religious message could the editor of these tales have found in this strange occurrence in the life of Israel's greatest and most honored monarch?

It is plain that our editor was thinking of David as already a sovereign, for he makes the Philistines call him "the king of the land," although in fact he was as yet merely a runaway from the court of King Saul, suspected and hated because of his too great popularity, and apparently unattended by any followers. Now that a king of whom popular fame was singing,

Saul hath slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands,

should deliberately act the lunatic is, to say the least, surprisingly undignified. Evidently this discerning editor wished us to notice that David did not let his dignity stand in his way. And it was a point worth emphasizing, for dignity has been a most serious impediment to many men with king-like rôles to play in the world's life. They have been willing to do almost anything for a great cause provided it did not make them appear ridiculous. People dare be anything but fools. Now David's life was in peril: he had to choose between his dignity and his neck; and he chose the latter. It may have been a mortifying memory that stayed with him all his days, that once before the traditional foes of his people, the detested Philistines, he had been forced to appear an idiot; but it was necessary to keep himself for the larger work God had in store for him.

There are strange items in the program God assigns to every man. Few of us fail to find ourselves led into situations where we feel like fools. This odd event in King

David's assorted experience recalls a similar happening that remained fixed in the memory of the Apostle Paul. Have you ever noticed how he concludes that striking Odyssey of woes in the Eleventh Chapter of Second Corinthians? He runs over the list of his toils and pains—prisons, stripes, deaths, stonings, perils of robbers, of rivers, in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren, labor and travail, hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, shipwreck ("a night and a day have I been in the deep")—and then as the climax of all: "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes in order to take me: and through a window was I let down in a basket by the wall, and escaped his hands." Why does he place that adventure in a basket above stonings and shipwrecks and what not? John Henry Newman called Paul a proud man; whether he was or not, he had a certain position in the world, and to think of the brilliant pupil of Gamaliel, the man who had been commissioned by the chief priests to stamp out the troublesome sect of the Nazarenes, the man who had become the leading figure in that growing

sect, the man who could not have been unaware of his own superbly equipped and keen-cutting intellect, the citizen of the Roman Empire who knew well how to assert his rights and make the magistrates of so considerable a place as Philippi come and apologize for having beaten him—to think of that man being bundled, as Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor bundle the absurd Sir John Falstaff, into a clothes-basket, and lowered over the wall all doubled up inside, was surely the extreme humiliation. The apostle looked back on that as the culmination of the things he had endured for the sake of the exacting Master he served. When he asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" it had never occurred to him that he would be told to pocket his pride and be packed away in a hamper.

You and I, as Christians, are summoned to be kings unto God. We are to be the lordly children of the Lord of heaven and earth; but we must expect some queer items in the kingly existence. Conscientious followers of Christ repeatedly discover themselves in comic situations. We pass

so quickly in our most earnest efforts from the sublime to the ridiculous. Recall the efforts you have made to talk to some indifferent man about personal religion, your experiences as a Sunday school teacher, your work for some great public cause, and how grotesquely the droll and the serious were blended! There were times when you did not know whether to laugh or cry. There were certainly moments when others thought you a fool, and when you were entirely ready to agree with them. But the point is that the ridiculous seems to be as truly part of God's will as the sublime. David playing the madman is no less the man after God's own heart than David the sweet singer of Israel, or David the slayer of Goliath of Gath.

A moment ago we were contrasting David's escape from his perilous position by making a fool of himself with a possible escape by some act of bravery. Perhaps there is no such contrast; it often requires considerable courage to be willing to be scorned as an idiot. Many of us can stand almost anything but that. Hawthorne has written: "The greatest obstacle to being

heroic is the doubt whether one may not be going to prove one's self a fool; the truest heroism is to resist the doubt; and the profoundest wisdom to know when it ought to be resisted, and when to be obeyed." All Christian service contains that risk; we are constantly doing things that men of a certain reputation for shrewdness consider silly. Paul said once sarcastically: "We are fools for Christ's sake"; but he might have said it as truly in sober seriousness. There was not a man who graduated from Gamaliel's classroom with him who would not have told you that Saul of Tarsus had a splendid record at Jerusalem and showed marvellous promise, but the poor fellow became the victim of a fantastic delusion and was as mad as a March hare. And there must have been times when it was difficult for Paul not to share their opinion. When everybody looks at you with a pitying glance as "a little off," it is not easy to maintain one's assurance of sobriety. When he saw the incredulous looks of his questioners on Mars' Hill, when he preached and noticed distinguished hearers nodding knowingly at one another and remarking that

the fellow was beside himself, it required unusual courage to persevere. Nobody can be genuinely in earnest without appearing eccentric in a world where intensity is considered bad form. All devoted Christians seem a little, perhaps very, queer to men and women whose hearts have never been kindled with their fire. We must certainly not cultivate singularity; the sanest of us have enough eccentricities without seeking to add to them; but we need the daring that keeps us faithful to our highest Christian impulses and persistent in our most exacting Christian tasks, when our comfortable and unenthusiastic acquaintances let us know that they consider us odd. "We are fools for Christ's sake."

This incident discloses a certain sense of humor in King David. One can imagine him smiling inwardly as he drummed on the door, assumed an utterly idiotic expression, and saw the indignant and insulted Achish berate his officious servants for having ventured to inflict a lunatic on him. The whole affair was a joke; and one is glad to think that poor David, whose existence at that time was an uninterrupted chapter of

perils and hardships, had the solid satisfaction of at least one good, hearty laugh, although he was forced to muffle it and keep it to himself.

Possibly we may be attributing to our discerning historian a purpose that was foreign to his mind when we think of his including this droll incident in order to teach his readers the value of humor as a tool in God's service. David conquered one Philistine with a sling, and another by a practical joke; and who will say that the second was not as divine a method as the first? Much might be said for the sustaining power of a sense of the comic. There are exceedingly difficult and trying circumstances to be endured, when a man's eye for the absurd side of a vexation is the secret of his patience. If one did not smile to one's self at certain types of people, one might lose temper, and tongue, and every Christian grace, in dealing with them. David's quiet laugh at Achish and his men must have been a refreshing brook by the way, of which he drank and lifted up his head.

And it was his sense of humor that saved

his life. If he had not been able to make a buffoon of himself he would have been speedily put out of the way as a dangerous Hebrew warrior; but Achish could not bring himself to kill a fool. What was the use? Humor is an effective weapon for disarming hostility. The sharpness of controversy can be sheathed if a man will only exercise his appreciation of the comic and introduce the playful element. One can say well-nigh anything inoffensively if it is mixed with a sufficient quantity of foolishness. This is not to commend flippancy; far from it. Poor David was never more dead in earnest than when he was screwing up his face into the most outlandish grimaces and scrabbling on the door: his life depended on the idiocy of his appearance. "Humor," Miss Thackeray has well phrased it, "Humor is thinking in fun, while we feel in earnest."

And again we were contrasting this fantastic way of meeting a crisis with that of appealing devoutly to God. There seems to be a difference between David's method when the people were on the point of stoning him, and it is written, "But David

strengthened himself in Jehovah, his God," and this narrative where he pretends to be mad. But why should we insist on a contrast? Is it not as likely that David strengthened himself in God, and that the waking of his sense of humor to the possible comic escape from his predicament was God's answer to his appeal? Shall we not reckon humor among the offspring of the Father of mercies? It requires strength to think in fun, while we feel in earnest—the strength of perfect poise and self-possession. A man cannot be frightened to death and keep his wits about him and carry off his part. David's life hung in the balance; but he was in no panic; he had hold of himself, and could act this absurd rôle with complete success. It is a striking instance of the perfect peace of a mind stayed on God.

And how immensely desirable is this strength to think in fun while we feel in earnest! It saves one from a vast amount of nervous wear and tear. David had a most racking experience at the court of Achish; after such an ordeal most of us would have been entirely used up mentally; but we can fancy the comedy of the situation

in which he had so delightfully outwitted the Philistines proving an exhilarating tonic to him. As he chuckled to himself, his nerves were soothed. And today in the heat of a discussion when fiery minds are clashing and opinions tenaciously espoused are crashing against each other, the speaker who, while feeling intensely his conviction, has the strength to phrase his thought playfully, not only makes his cause stronger, but changes the atmosphere in which the entire argument rages. Or when a fondly cherished enterprise falls into desperate straits, and its adherents are crushed and bowed, it is not the weak man but the strong, who can put the situation with a light touch that not only relieves the strain, but in the darkest moment will break a small crack through which a ray of brightness finds its way. There is no surer test of the possession of divine power than self-control; and there is no more searching test of self-control than the ability to let one's thoughts play. When they are crowded and cramped, like a wedged mob in a panic, they cannot play. Staying them on God restores order, and order brings calm and buoyancy.

Strange how the deepest things, like our touch with God, and the lightest things, like the surface ripple of humor, are inseparably connected!

And already we are passing from what may seem a rather trivial topic to life's profoundest theme. Classifications into sane and lunatic have sometimes been the division into human and divine. When David was classed as a madman he was put in distinguished company. We have already mentioned St. Paul, to whom Festus said, "Paul, thou art mad"; and there is David's own greater Son, of whom His puzzled and annoyed kinsmen said, "He is beside Himself." Had our Lord Jesus, a week before Palm Sunday, as He was approaching Jerusalem, sent for some eminently wise man of affairs, who was sympathetic with Him, a man like Nicodemus for example, and had He unfolded to him His plan of offering Himself publicly to the nation as its Messiah, letting them take Him, condemn Him, hand Him over to the Romans who would crucify Him, and then from that cross rule the world, it is quite certain that level-headed Nicodemus would have looked

at Him in blank amazement, asked Him, "Are you serious?" and gone away shaking his head, confident that the Teacher who had once made so deep an impression on him, and whose personality he still found so charming, had gone entirely out of His senses. Saul of Tarsus recalled how the crucifixion had appeared to him when he first learned of it in Jerusalem. The clever pupil of Gamaliel had been told that a certain Jesus from Galilee had given Himself out as the Messiah; had attracted a few followers; had come up to the capital and made an open issue with the leaders of the nation, so that they had concluded that He must be silenced and discredited; that they had succeeded in getting Him executed; but that several hundred or even thousand persons were going about saying that He was alive, alive with power; that the cross was His supreme act as God's Son; and the brilliant young student had laughed out loud, "What foolishness!" But the years often reverse a good many of our opinions; and the years together with some marvellous divine experience had completely changed Paul's mind. That foolishness was God's

doing, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men. Paul was spending his life being called a fool, preaching the message of the cross as the clearest expression of God's mind and strength, His wisdom and power—a preaching that almost everybody pronounced foolishness.

Take the spirit of Calvary out of the past and show what it implies today; point out what it demands in a nation's foreign relations, in industrial arrangements, in legal procedure, in business methods, in racial relations, in family ideals, in personal principles; and are there a great many people, are there many of us, college men, who are entirely convinced that this is good business, practical politics, *savoir faire*, expedient conduct? What is wisdom and what is folly in this half-sane, half-mad world of ours? Is there anywhere a standard, an expression in intelligible form, of the ultimate wisdom on which the entire universe is based?

There are many times when our world's life strikes us as calculated to be comedy to Somebody wiser than man. There are countless things we take with the utmost

seriousness which, in some more reflective mood, impress us as constituting a gigantic farce to some big Gulliver looking down on us Lilliputians. "It is He that sitteth above the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers"; and there are times, according to Jesus, when He who sitteth above says to certain grasshoppers, "Thou fool." Yes, it might be comedy, if it were not something else. Look at the distinguished members of the Jewish Sanhedrin worrying their wives and imperilling their health with night sessions of their august body—all serious to a degree about this dangerous Pretender from Galilee, who is so out of harmony with their idea of the fitness of things. Look at Pilate "drest in a little brief authority," who, while taking himself quite seriously and being taken seriously by everybody else, blunders through his official duties. Look at the crowds of practical, moderately intelligent people flocking back from the place of execution telling one another that this new movement that was making such a stir has certainly received its effective quietus. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and

the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed. . . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh." Yes, there's comedy in it: but it is too grim for comedy. These sane, sagacious humans have driven nails in the hands and feet of the Son of God, and wet the cross with His flowing blood! It is tragedy, not comedy; there are tears above, not laughter.

But in that act deep-seeing men have found the disclosure of sane and insane, wisdom and folly. It is there they have seen most clearly the rationale of the universe: "Christ crucified, the wisdom of God."

Does the spirit of that cross appeal to us as so good that it ought to be true, so glorious that we wish with all our hearts that it would work? Are we prepared to experiment with it? Have we experimented enough already to have an experience that convinces us that it does work, that it is both the wisdom and the power of God? Are we deliberately taking our tangled social problems and our intricate personal questions up to the summit of Calvary, and letting its light make plain our solutions?

Those solutions will not commend themselves to everybody. The world's great accomplishments have all been wrought by those whom men thought unpractical beforehand, and then agreed with, when the results were all in. And for us it is simply a question whether we dare be "fools for Christ's sake."

VII

REVELATION BY CONCEALMENT

Mark 4: 22. For there is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light.

We do not know whether this is an original saying of our Lord's, or a common proverb which He picked up in the speech of His day. It is the sort of truth that the experience of the race discovers and coins into a maxim. The more one tries to conceal something the likelier it is to be found out. What is told confidentially itches to be repeated. But if Jesus did not Himself mint this saying but found it in circulation, it is not the same common coin since He used it. He left nothing as He got it. He took the familiar words of men's religious speech—God, kingdom, peace, joy, love—and transmuted them into new words by touching them with His personality: "My God, My kingdom, My peace, My joy, as I have loved you." His own experience is

an alembic that turns to gold all that it receives. He fills His sentences with something from within Himself, so His words become spirit and life. He never says anything just because He has heard others say it. If He uses their identical language, it is to express a truth which has come to Him as a personal discovery. All His sayings are fragments of autobiography. He has personally observed that this is a world in which things are hidden, but hidden not to stay concealed, but by their very concealment to come to clearer light.

It does not take long to discover that ours is a world of secrets. Our curiosity is forever tantalized by happenings we cannot explain and by hints which leave us still inquiring. Mr. Bagehot, in his essay on Clough, writes: "Undeniably this is an odd world, whether it should have been so or no; and all our speculations upon it should begin with some admission of its strangeness and singularity." But we instinctively rebel at mystery. We want to know, and we feel that we have a right to know. Generation after generation of men have tried to tear aside the veils, pry into the unlighted nooks

and crannies of existence, and make all things plain. They have met with some splendid successes. Knowledge has grown from more to more. But the more men know the more they see remains unknown. Some have grown desperate in the presence of the Sphinx-like secretiveness of the universe. Heine protested that the world was "an age-long riddle which only fools expect to solve." George Gissing makes Henry Ryecroft write in his Private Papers: "It may well be that what we call the unknowable will be for ever the unknown. In that thought is there not a pathos beyond words? It may be that the human race will live and pass away; all mankind, from him who in the world's dawn first shaped to his fearful mind an image of the Lord of life, to him who, in the dusking twilight of the last age, shall crouch before a deity of stone or wood; and never one of that long lineage have learned the wherefore of his being. The prophets, the martyrs, their noble anguish vain and meaningless; the wise whose thought strove to eternity, and was but an idle dream; the pure in heart whose life was a vision of the living God, the suffering

and the mourners whose solace was in a world to come, the victims of injustice who cried to the Judge Supreme—all gone down into silence, and the globe that bare them circling dead and cold through soundless space."

But this is the direct opposite of the faith of Jesus. He assents to the statement that our world is secretive; but He feels the mystery no burden. Life's unintelligible aspects are no weary and heavy weight to Him. "It is what we should expect," He assures us. "It is My Father's way of telling things by making secrets of them; to show them to us more plainly by hiding them away." He would have liked Walter Pater's fine phrase, "the hiddenness of perfect things," and He would have gone further and asserted that they were hidden not to prevent us from getting at them but (strange as it may seem) in order to help us to reach them.

Take nature, for instance, and what a vast hiding-place it has proved! "There is no new thing under the sun," in the sense of being formed for the first time today. Our latest novelty has existed from the

beginning, and was latent in the frame of things. It has been lying in the dark waiting for our hands to lift it to the light. As parents, who on Christmas Eve have filled their children's stockings, grow almost impatient if the child next morning spends too much time over the first thing he pulls out, and long to see him go further in and get at the better things they have stowed away in the toe, so one can fancy God eagerly waiting through the ages to see His children bring out one and another good gift He has aforeprepared for them. How delighted He must be when investigators happen on some device that will lessen the sufferings of the sick, or discover a principle that will enable men to distribute more justly earth's riches and make joy in wider commonalty shared, or arrange some contrivance to relieve laborious drudgery, or apply His spirit to some relations in life in which they had been acting selfishly before!

Ah, but why, if He is so anxious to have them find all these things out, has He been at such pains to conceal them that it has taken centuries, yes, untold æons, to uncover them? Had they all been perfectly plain,

what would men have done with them? We let a child make pothooks with a pencil or a bit of chalk before we give him a fountain pen or a typewriter. He must find out and appreciate what letters are, and what he can do with them, before we facilitate his making them. Give him a typewriter to start with, and he will break it in attempting to play with it, and perhaps hurt himself with some of the broken pieces. When he has a worthy idea of what to do with it, then it can be safely put in his hands. Had all the devices of modern surgery been known to the American Indians or to the Spanish Inquisitors, how many times more hellish might they have made their tortures! The wonder is that God allowed His children to know so much, when they used their knowledge for such deviltry. But the point is that by hiding things in nature He has not permanently kept them from us, but put them at our disposal. If they had been easier to get at, we should not have mastered them nearly so well. All the experiments which failed went to equip the experimenter who succeeded with skill to make the most of his discovery.

There are no locked closets in our Father's house into which we are forbidden to go. Every door has a key; and we find the key as soon as we can profitably use the contents of the closets. A Prometheus who discovers some boon for his fellow mortals is not punished for his boldness by an angry deity. He may not be well treated by his neighbors whom he is seeking to bless; we have a way of crucifying innovators on crosses of criticism or worse; but God is never offended. He takes care that no light is ever eclipsed by darkness, no love holden permanently of prejudice. There are no rooms in the house of many mansions He is not glad to have us explore. Our Father wants us to know. We dishonor Him by supposing that He is ever pleased when we take ignorance for piety and fold our hands before a mystery, saying, "I accept it, but do not presume to try to understand it." "Prove all things." He has hidden them only to pique our curiosity. "There is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light."

So too in Jesus' own parables (and Mark

connects this saying in his Gospel with Jesus' parables), as in nature, from which Jesus has drawn them, the purpose of the story is not to conceal truth but to make it plainer. Tell a man something outright and he says, "I understand; that's clear as day," and excuses himself from further thought upon it. Put it in a tale that suggests more than it actually says, and his interest is awakened. Christians, who take their Master seriously and try to think out what His teachings mean for them today, are often disappointed. "Why did not Jesus take up this question that puzzles me? Why did not He make what He expected of us entirely clear? How am I to know what as a Christian I am to do under these circumstances? How unsatisfactory to have a handful of picturesque stories, and a few sayings, like turning the other cheek, and letting your coat go with your cloak, and walking the second mile, and being salt, and light, and leaven, and sheep, and friends, and brethren, and little children, as our sole guide to the intricate conditions in which we are placed!" Yes, but the Light of life, the solution of every per-

plexity is hid in these few words; and the answer to each question comes out when we need it and can employ it. The very fact that it requires hard thinking on our part to reason out exactly what it means to be salt, and light, and leaven, to be a friend of Christ and a child of God, in this position and in that relation, enables us when we arrive at our conclusions to act with an independence and an assurance we could never otherwise have possessed. "I have conscientiously thought this thing through, and my mind is made up." It is not an inviting prospect for the intellectually indolent. Jesus never says, "Come unto Me, all ye who are too lazy to think for yourselves." He tells us frankly that He is hiding His meaning in His words and that we will have to stir up our minds to search it out. But that will help us master the answer. "There is nothing hid, save that it should be manifested; neither was anything made secret, but that it should come to light."

Or take Jesus Himself. We are about to celebrate again His birth as the child of Galilean peasants who were lodged in a

barn. It would seem as though God had put the light of the world under a bushel and not on a lampstand. One can look in through our text to a long chapter in the thought of Jesus. As He grew to manhood and gradually became aware of His life-purpose must He not often have asked Himself, "Why was I so humbly born? Why had I no greater advantages in education? Why have I been set for these thirty years in this out-of-the-way town of Nazareth?" And when the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them swam within His ken, and He realized that He had a meaning and a message for them, that He was a Light to lighten the Gentiles, His Kingdom leaven to transform the whole mass of humanity, how hard it must have been for Him to hide Himself in the little villages of Galilee! On what assurance did He rest His expectation of achieving His purpose and becoming the Messiah through whom God's world-kingdom is set up? The text gives us His conviction, the conviction by which He deliberately confined Himself to a small world and hid Himself in a few dozen people, into whom He succeeded in breath-

ing His Spirit. "There is nothing hid, save that it should come to light." If a thing was perfect, let it be hidden, it would not be obscured. Let Him do one thing thoroughly, and the excellence of what He had done would ensure its own notoriety. Let Him hide Himself in Matthew and John and Peter, and He would come to the blaze of noonday in renewed lives, in Gospel pages, in sheep for whom undershepherds gave their lives, in the regeneration of all things into love like His own.

Or take Jesus as He appears to us. If we attempt to get back to Him and see the Figure that moved among men, what do we find? A Man at many points the product of His age, with the world-view of His contemporaries, ascribing certain forms of disease and insanity to demons, as we would not ascribe them with our scientific knowledge today; a Jew, with the intense feelings of His race for Jerusalem and the national destiny; a Galilean carpenter, with the outlook of His class and with no apparent interest in culture, in art, in music, in statesmanship, in countless areas of man's high development. As we look closer we are

astonished to find in this Mind, so largely filled with the thoughts common to the men of His day, a wisdom that we never seem to overpass; in this Jew, a world Soul with limitless sympathies and unbounded purposes; in this Peasant and Mechanic, a Spirit which seems native to every sphere of culture and human activity, so that we feel no violence in associating Him with art, with music, with science, and with every thing true, lovely and honorable, whether it came within His range of vision in His lifetime or not. But the Mind, the Soul, the Spirit, seem hidden in the first-century Jewish artisan. But why hidden? If the Word, the Light, the Life, the Love of God, were to be communicated to men, how could God accomplish it more effectively than by compressing all into a human life? And if this life be really human, not simply masquerading here as human, it must be the life of a Man of a particular age, nation and class. When the Word was made flesh, there was a hiding of God's power. We can be so occupied with the flesh that we see nothing through it. But the hiding is really not to conceal but to reveal, to manifest the

eternal life, which is God's own life and which His children can share with Him, the life of trust, of hope, of devotion to the great purpose of the Kingdom of love.

Or, to take but one other instance, God Himself seems very elusive, reticent, secretive. If He wants the company of like-minded children, why is it so easy for us to live without having His presence obtruded upon us, without even suspecting that He exists at all? If we look for Him, is He not always concealed? We say we know Him as the Creator of the universe, but how He hides His shaping hands underneath processes of evolution, chains of causes, one thing leading to another, so that it is hard to disentangle Him from that which is not He! We say we see Him in providence, in His ordering of the events of our lives; but, when we look for Him, here are coincidences, chance happenings, our own skill, someone's loving thought of us—a whole network of occurrences in which we cannot distinguish His part from ours and our neighbors' and say, "There, that's God's doing; see Him through that; that shows what He is." We say that He

reveals Himself in the Bible; but the Bible contains a great mixture of things temporary, like the Jewish Law, and things eternal, like the spirit of Jesus, of things very undivine to us, like the slaughters of the Canaanites and the cursing prayers of some of the psalmists, and things as divine as the cross of Christ; what is man's and what is God's in the inspired Scriptures? God's word is here, but hidden beneath a mass of obsolete science, faulty history, outworn ethics, crude theology. We say that God is in people round about us, but what in them is His, and what not?

> He hides Himself within the love
> Of those whom we love best.

We say that He is in ourselves, a present guiding, strengthening, sanctifying Spirit, but in our thought what is His wisdom and what our own? In our impulses what comes from Him, and what from ourselves? In our characters what is of His creating and what is due to our own striving towards righteousness?

> Draw, if thou canst, the mystic line
> Severing rightly His from thine,
> Which is human, which divine.

"Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

Strange that if He should wish to make Himself known, to give us His friendship and admit us to His intimacy, He should go about it in this round about way, which apparently leads as often in the opposite direction! What is the meaning of it?

You may remember the character of Nydia, the blind Thessalian flower girl, in Bulwer-Lytton's "Last Days of Pompeii." She is introduced to us singing the pathetic song:

Ye have a world of light
  Where love in the loved rejoices;
But the blind girl's home is the House of Night,
  And its beings are empty voices.
As one in the realm below,
I stand by the streams of woe!
I hear the vain shadows glide,
I feel their soft breath at my side.
  And I thirst the loved forms to see,
And I stretch my fond arms around,
And I catch but a shapeless sound,
  For the living are ghosts to me.

Through the events of the story she passes in sadness, cut off by her blindness from all

her heart desires. Then at the conclusion of the narrative comes that fateful day when Vesuvius breaks forth, and the doomed city is dark as midnight beneath the thick pall of smoke and falling ashes, and the terror-stricken inhabitants rush blindly and stumble and lose themselves in the awful blackness; but Nydia, from whose sightless eyes the light has always been hidden, threads her way unerringly through the streets and squares of the town, and rescues her beloved.

God's hiding of Himself develops our instinct for Him, the sense of touch with which we become aware of His presence, the sensitive hearing which enables us to distinguish His voice amid the confusion of sounds, the inward sight which sees Him, however many the other objects in the same field of vision. God's self-concealment is not to keep away from us, but to teach us more surely to detect and find Him. For the moment He seems to wrap Himself in clouds and darkness, only that our sight may be sharpened to pierce clouds and see Him, who dwelleth in light unapproachable save by eyes lit with trustful love.

Jesus never said anything without telling us something about God. His Father was the one topic of His conversation, and this saying is no exception. Jesus, as we, walked by faith, and not by sight. There were times when God was hidden from Him; but He knew that the hiding was solely for purposes of discovery. "Thy Father who is in secret," He called Him. Take the supreme instance when on the cross darkness is over all the land, and darkness actually shrouds the soul of the sinless Son of God, so that His Father is veiled from Him, and He cries, "Forsaken." But God is never hid, save that He should be manifested; neither is He ever Himself secret, but that He should come to light. Jesus' faith faced the darkness as an obscuring of God only to make Him plainer, and prayed, "My God, My God," in the very breath that He had to confess His sense of desertion. And that exercise of faith still further sharpens His sense for the divine; purifies (if we dare say it) even His stainless heart; so that with keener eyesight He sees God. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Jesus' lifelong conviction is justified. God has

withdrawn Himself only to be more surely found, concealed Himself only to be more clearly seen as One who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all.

VIII

THE RELIGIOUS FACULTY

Acts 9: 7. The men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the sound, but beholding no man.

Acts 22: 9. They that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me.

From Christianity's earliest days it has been the custom to point to Jesus' resurrection as a convincing proof of His Messiahship, a compelling argument for believing in Him. But today probably no one becomes a follower of Jesus on account of His resurrection. Nobody believes in the fact of the resurrection unless he has for some other reason come to believe in Jesus. And this seems exactly what Jesus Himself expected. In His parable when Dives in torments pleads that Abraham will send the beggar Lazarus to warn his brothers, urging, "If one go to them from the dead, they will surely repent"; Jesus makes Abraham reply, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they

be persuaded, if one rise from the dead." Jesus did not think that any who had not been convinced by His teaching, which was the fulfillment and completion of all that was true in Moses and the prophets, would be persuaded by His rising. This accounts for one puzzling feature of His recorded appearances: He does not seem to have manifested Himself to any man, with the possible exception of Paul, who was not already His follower. We must often have wondered why He did not show Himself to the Sanhedrin who condemned Him, to Pilate and Herod and the soldiers. What better start could He have given His cause in the world than by gaining over the very men who were responsible for His crucifixion? What a force in founding the Christian Church in Jerusalem Caiaphas, the converted high priest, would have been, and how effective Pilate would have proved as an apostle to Rome! But it is to His disciples only that He returns. Even the five hundred whom Paul mentions are called "brethren," indicating that they were already adherents of His cause. The only man who belonged to the ranks of His

opponents to whom He manifested Himself is Saul of Tarsus, the pupil of Gamaliel and agent of the Sanhedrin in persecuting the devotees of this new Way; so that his conversion has a special interest. But did Jesus really alter His method and by a marvellous occurrence convince an otherwise wholly hostile man?

Something startling happened on the road to Damascus. It was seen and heard by Saul and his companions; all saw a light and heard a sound; but to Saul of Tarsus it was an entirely different experience than to his fellow travellers. They saw the light; he saw the Figure of Jesus. They heard a confused noise; he heard a voice speaking personally to him. How much of that experience took place within his own mind, and how much was seen and heard by his senses, he could probably never have told. When he wrote of it to the Galatians, he said, "It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son *in me.*" The noise they heard and the light they saw appear to have made no religious impression on Saul's escort; in spite of the transformation in their leader they do not seem to have become

Christians; but Saul of Tarsus underwent a change that completely altered his career, and has left an indelible impress upon the history of mankind. The same light and the same noise—what different results!

When Paul looked back on his experience, he did not emphasize its suddenness. He writes that "it was the good pleasure of God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace." This seemed

> a day to which all days
> Were footsteps in God's secret ways.

His mind had already been appealed to by something in the message of this Jesus, for he was kicking against the goad in rejecting Him. So that Paul's case is not really different from that of the others. His conscience had already been laid hold of, and the assurance that Jesus was alive in power simply completed the conversion of his reason.

All this is most interesting as shedding light on the question of religious belief and unbelief. Our world is the same for everybody, with the same day and night, work and play, sickness and health, joy and

sorrow, life and death. The differences between the lots of individuals are insignificant as compared with the sameness of that which is everybody's. But there are two very different interpretations of it. To one set of people the world is just the world; they take it as they find it, enjoy what is pleasant and grumble at what is otherwise, use according to their capacity the stock of wisdom they inherit from the experiences of their predecessors, and go through life and into death without any sense of the existence of an Invisible Companion. To others the world is not just the world, but the world and its invisible but most real Lord, from whom they accept its arrangements, to whom they ascribe the inspiration of the wisest and best thoughts they find in their own or other men's minds, and in whose personal friendship they pass through life and into death with a vivid anticipation of something beyond. How is it that the same set of facts conveys such different impressions?

You may recall the scene in the tavern in "Silas Marner" where the village worthies discuss the credibility of ghosts.

"There's folks, i' my opinion," says the landlord, "they can't see ghos'es, not if they stood as plain as a pike-staff before 'em. And there's reason i' that. For there's my wife, now, can't smell, not if she'd the strongest o' cheese under her nose. I never see'd a ghost myself; but then I says to myself, 'Very like I haven't got the smell for 'em.' "

"Tut, tut," answers the farrier, "what's the smell got to do with it? If ghos'es want me to believe in 'em, let 'em leave off skulking i' the dark and i' lone places: let 'em come where there's company and candles."

There are similar attitudes towards God. Some people with a taste for Him stoutly declare His reality; while others insist that, if God wants them to believe in Him, He ought to disclose Himself so plainly that there could be no mistaking Him. They resent this uncertainty. "Facts are facts," they remind us. "There is no difference of opinion about the warmth of sunlight or the wetness of rain. The sun shines on the evil and the good, and the rain falls on just and unjust. Why should not God, if He exists, make Himself equally indisputable? If

Jesus rose from the dead and is alive with power, why should not all see His form and hear His voice?"

Apples have tumbled from trees ever since Eve in Eden was tempted by one of them; but none seems to have suggested anything momentous until in the garden at Woolsthorpe one fell into a mind teeming with thought and brought to Newton the discovery of the law of gravitation. A square yellow book, a hundred and sixty-seven years old, small quarto size, with crumpled vellum covers, part print, part manuscript, containing the record of the sordid murder of a young wife and her two reputed parents by a vicious husband and four desperadoes, must have been fingered by many hands and scanned by many undiscerning pairs of eyes as it lay with a lot of old and new trash on a stall on a step of the Ricardi Palace in the Square of San Lorenzo in Florence, until one fiercely hot June day in 1865 an English poet picked it up and got it for sixteen cents, and in his heart and mind full of insight and sympathy, learning and genuis, its tale became "The Ring and the Book"—perhaps the greatest

creation of our literature in the century. Insignificant falling apples and insignificant second-hand books suddenly assume marvellous meaning when they catch a seeing eye. The law of gravitation ought to have been patent to everybody; but it was not, until a prepared mind saw it in a flash of insight. The fact that every individual in a story has a distinctive point of view of his own ought to have been plain to everyone; but it never received its due expression until the genius for sympathy of Robert Browning embodied it in his incomparable dozen cycles. The fact that the cause of Jesus could not be beaten, that Jesus Himself could not be killed and banished from God's earth, ought to have been clear to everyone; but it was only the faith of the disciples and the mastered conscience of Saul of Tarsus that made the discovery. The reality of God should have been obvious to everybody; but, as a matter of history, there have always been believers and sceptics.

There was a close friendship between Thomas Huxley and Professor Haughton, although they stood far apart in religious conviction. Haughton, before his death,

told of a conversation with Huxley in which the latter said to him: "There are those who profess to believe what I consider false; but I do not regard their opinions, because I doubt the sincerity of some and the intellectual capacity of others; but I respect you, and I know how sincerely you believe what you hold so strongly, and should like very much to know how it is that you believe what I can't believe." "May I speak frankly?" asked Haughton. "Certainly." "Then," he said, "I don't know how it is, except that you are color-blind." Huxley was much struck. "Well, it may be so. Of course, if I were color-blind, I should not know it myself." "The men that were with him stood speechless, hearing the sound, but beholding no man." "They that were with me beheld indeed the light, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

This may be very depressing. If faith is a peculiar faculty which some possess and others lack, then a man either has or hasn't it, and if he hasn't it, he must content himself with seeing a blurring light where others have a vision of God in Christ, and with hearing a confused noise in what to

others is the personal call of God. But our religious sense like our taste in literature, or our conscience, or our appreciation of music, is a developable instinct. Goethe told Eckermann, "I show you only the best works, and when you are grounded in these you will have a standard for the rest"; and Matthew Arnold recommended us all to carry about in our heads scraps of Homer and Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare, Milton and Keats, and whenever we are required to admire the worthless and extol the commonplace, to murmur these passages under our breath as a kind of taste tonic. A correct conscience is not something that is born in us. A small boy is as likely to arrive in the world with a silk hat on his head as with a proper sense of obligation. Father and mother, teachers and pastor, must set themselves to educate him in responsibility, and produce in him a conscience that shall function properly under all life's complex circumstances. Many people prefer the latest popular melody to Beethoven or Wagner, but we do not consider their musical standards final. We believe that education, contact with some-

thing better suggesting inevitable contrasts, an ear gradually becoming more sensitive will enable them to hear in the masters of sound what no cheap and vulgar hack who tosses off songs by the ream can possibly furnish. Religious faith—the appreciation of God, the sense of His presence, the eye for His goodness and the ear for His summons to duty—can be cultivated. Saul's companions need not remain seers only of a light and hearers of a noise.

Edmund Burke, in his treatise on "The Sublime and Beautiful," remarks that "it is known that the taste is improved exactly as we improve our judgment by extending our knowledge, by a steady attention to our object, and by frequent exercise."

"By extending our knowledge." No man can appreciate poetry unless he is fairly well read in the poets. No man can hope for a rich experience of God unless he is conversant with those great souls who in the past have walked closely with Him. And no man is justified in saying that he sees nothing in religion until he has familiarized himself with the God of Jesus, asked open-mindedly what Jesus actually

believed He got out of the Unseen. To extend our knowledge of the God of Moses and Elijah, of Amos and Hosea, of Isaiah and Jeremiah, of the psalmists, the historians, the wise men of Israel, of God seen through Jesus by the evangelists and letter writers of the New Testament, is to go a long way towards awakening and strengthening in ourselves that instinct which sees Him who is invisible. And as Rosalind says, "The sight of lovers feedeth those in love"; so familiarity with believers feedeth those in faith.

"By a steady attention to our object." Does the Christian God appeal to us as desirable? Would we prefer His existence to His non-existence? Would we care to live in a world with Him? If we really believed in Him, it would certainly make vast differences in our modes of life, in our plans for our careers, in our attitude towards all sorts of questions, in the risks we were prepared to take, in the things we would absolutely refuse to do. Would the God of Jesus be convenient or inconvenient to us? Do we honestly want to believe in Him, provided we sincerely can? No one

will give "a steady attention" to the search for God unless he is desperately eager to be sure of Him; and it has been the experience of many centuries that nobody ever sought God with his whole heart and failed to find Him. It requires a venture. Faith is a matter of daring. One must be prepared to risk trying love as the ultimate wisdom and the final force in the universe, precisely as Jesus took the supreme risk of Calvary. And without this "steady attention to our object" there is no reason for imagining that God will become palpably evident to us.

"And by frequent exercise." Paul told King Agrippa that he had not been disobedient unto his heavenly vision. If he had, it is likely that he would have some day come to the conclusion that his companions, and not he, were right. There had been a blinding light and a bewildering noise, but it might have been any one of half a dozen occurrences that are liable to take place any time on the road to Damascus. What convinced Paul was the life into which his vision led him. People might tell him that he had had a sunstroke; but he knew that, sunstroke or something else, he had been

led into a career of usefulness; that life had assumed a new meaning and fascination for him; that depths of joy and peace and strength and hope had been opened up; that he had passed into a friendship he could only adequately describe by saying that he knew the God and Father of Jesus Christ. As he obeyed the impulses that came upon him with mastering force in that hour of his prostration, life disclosed its unsearchable riches for him. He saw and kept seeing what he had been blind to until now. He felt and kept feeling a vitality and an energy and a kindling passion which sent him over land and sea with power. He heard and kept hearing the assuring voice within saying, "Abba, Father," and giving him that sonship with the Lord of heaven and earth, which had been the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesus whose followers he had hunted down to death. However the light and the noise of the Damascus road might be explained physically, they had an indubitable moral significance. Christ had been formed in him, and it was no longer Saul of Tarsus that lived, but a new man in Christ Jesus. "By frequent exercise," by

unremitting toil for the Kingdom, that instinct for the living Christ, that faith in His God and Father, flourished and grew in vigor. Years after the startling day on the Damascus road, when life's experience had turned in its accumulated evidence, he wrote confidently, "I know whom I have believed."

The varied experiences of life may be divinely significant or baldly meaningless. They may be progressive disclosures of the face of God in Jesus Christ, opening up for us a more and more intimate fellowship with Him, or they may be just a series of happenings, pleasant or the reverse, but revealing nothing. They may be clear and distinct utterances of God to us, guiding, correcting, inspiring—the articulate word of the Most High, speaking as directly and personally to us and letting us as intimately into His friendship as the men of faith of the bygone generations; or they may be the usual rumble of the world's life, saying nothing. The seeing eye and the hearing ear are for us to develop. Whatever of God we see in any flash of insight, use, or it will fade into the light of common day. Visions obeyed

remain visions, the master lights of all our seeing, but disobeyed they turn into illusions. It is a sombre reflection that, after these centuries of His vital activity in the world, Jesus is still dead to so many; that the living God does not exist for everybody. It lies within our power to let Christ be a living factor in our careers, their controlling force; to give God the chance to be really God to us. The same light and the same sound can be so differently understood:

> Where one heard thunder, and one saw flame,
> I only know He named my name.

IX

UNEXPECTED SYMPATHY

2 Kings 6: 30. And the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh.

It was a great surprise to the people of Samaria to discover underneath the royal robes of their king this secret garb of mourning. As they endured the frightful horrors of famine during the siege, it had not occurred to them that he was suffering. So long as there was any food in the city, he would surely have it. He was keenly interested in the game of war, and they were mere pawns on the board. What did he know or care of their distress? The two women, who in their starvation had entered into this revolting compact to boil and eat each other's little boys, had thought to themselves that their dire condition was the wretched plight of the poor. As they watched the king attended by his guards going his rounds upon the walls, they may have said to themselves, "Little he thinks

of what we suffer!" But when one mother's love proved too strong to let her keep her awful bargain, and her neighbor's appeal for justice brought before the king this pitiful and sickening story, overwhelmed with horror, he rent his garments, and unconsciously disclosed a heart, a heart that entitles him to be remembered among the true kings of history, a heart wrung with the woes of his people: "Behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh."

All suffering is self-centring. Pain or sorrow sets us apart, gives us a sense of uniqueness, concentrates our attention upon ourselves, and makes us appear quite in a class of our own. Every patient thinks his a special case. Every sufferer feels there is an unusual element in his condition. Every lamentation runs: "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is brought upon me!" And our world is so ordered in the providence of God that our first discovery under such circumstances is, that so far from being singular, we are members of a great fraternity of fellow sufferers. We never have a disease without being astonished to find out how many of

our acquaintances are familiar with it. We never meet with an accident without reading in the papers of similar misfortunes happening to people all over the country. We never walk in the valley of the shadow of some loved one's death without hearing of friends with as sore a sorrow. We never confront some terrible ordeal without learning of others undergoing a similar strain. Face an operation, and it seems that everyone you know is in the hands of a surgeon; have your house robbed, and there have been burglaries on every block; suffer a nervous breakdown, and the whole world is or has been in a sanatorium. Every experience which appears to us uncommon and unprecedented proves an introduction to a community who greet us with an understanding we had not in the least anticipated. If misery likes company it seldom lacks it. And there are many who tell us that they have been almost compensated for their sickness or loss by the fellowship into which it has led them, and above all by the rending of conventional garments which concealed men and the uncovering of what lay beneath. It was nearly worth the misery of a famine

for the inhabitants of Samaria to learn what manner of man their king was.

It was his sudden emotion of horror that betrayed the king into this self-revelation. He had no idea of letting his people know that he wore sackcloth next his skin. Persons who feel keenly are usually uncommunicative about themselves. Someone has said rather cynically that the sympathy of most people consists of a mixture of good humor, curiosity and self-importance. And that sort of sympathy is ready enough to advertise and invite people to give it a chance to talk about itself. But men of genuinely sensitive feeling shrink from undressing their hearts in public. People may watch them every day as they walk on the walls of life attending to their duty. They know that they can go to them in need and depend on them to do justice to whatever they ask of them; but they know very little of what is underneath the man's robe of office. The deeper a man is, the less apparent is the effect painful experiences have upon him. A great rock thrown into a mountain lake raises a momentary splash and starts a series of surface ripples, but in

a very short while the lake appears exactly as it did before. The rock has effected a displacement of all the water in the lake, and it lies at the bottom with its jagged edges sharp and hard, but one would never suspect it. In a shallow pool the rock would have remained protruding above the surface; it would be far more conspicuous than the pool itself. We would think of the pool as the pool with the big rock; it would be the rock which gave it distinction. Some men's grief or poverty or disease is the only noticeable thing about them. Others are so big that, while we are with them, we lose sight of anything that has befallen them, however huge. They have the pain still with them, but it is out of sight. The robes they don to pace their round of duty, their working-clothes, cover up the sackcloth.

And this is especially true of people with responsibilities. It was the king's business to keep the famine-stricken people of that beleaguered city of good heart and hope. If he wore sackcloth, he must let nobody see it. He might feel more keenly than anyone else the tragic plight of his capital, but he dared not show his feelings. After a

business reverse the breadwinner feels the more need of keeping a brave front and carrying an undiscouraged face home at night, and his wife considers that she owes it to him to make the best of everything and seem passing rich on her curtailed resources. Many a home made wretched by wedded unhappiness sees the mother or father for the children's sake trying to go about as though nothing were wrong, wearing the sackcloth under the gay clothes of sociability. Death seldom leaves us without greater obligations to the living; and, that their lives be not shadowed and saddened, the heart's lonely mourning must be kept so hidden that they do not guess its existence. Girls at college often have some family anxiety pressing upon them, of which they feel bound to say nothing to their classmates, but they find it no easy thing to enter fully into everything that is going on here, when their thoughts and hearts are frequently elsewhere. All people who fill public positions, doctors and nurses with their patients, teachers with their pupils, ministers with their people, friends with those who look to them for inspiration and counsel, know what

it is to put personal feelings out of sight, and wear the garment of their own rejoicing, or the sackcloth of their grief, underneath the robe of office, while they make their rounds upon the wall.

And it is the covering of the sackcloth, and the keeping it covered, that require no small heroism. To come away from a doctor's office where the sentence of death has been as good as passed, or where one has been told that cherished plans must be abandoned and a very restricted life accepted with as good grace as one can muster, and to go home and readjust one's entire life without bating a jot of heart or hope, or at all events without allowing our condition to cast a cloud over the home circle; to carry about an inescapable anxiety for some loved one, for whose rectitude or self-control we have good cause to fear, and to move among our friends, trying to take a normal part in life's work and play; to go about life's business with the heart wrapped in the sackcloth of shame for some family disgrace, and disregard the occasional stares of curious persons and the ill-advised sympathy of the clumsily well-intentioned; to

have doubt gnawing one's cherished convictions or a heart broken by abused confidence, or to feel helplessly lonely for the sound of a voice that is still, and never allow our private pain to interfere with our public obligations; to wear the rough sackcloth next our flesh and walk the walls so that men never guess that we are not swathed in softest silk—such is the heroism of that unnamed king of Israel.

Perhaps the woman who called to him was surprised that he stopped to listen to her story. After all, who was she, desperate as was her condition, that the king should notice her? She understood why he was so attentive when with the rest she saw that sackcloth. We are often astonished at the sympathy some people give us. We did not know they were so interested in us, and we did not think that their experience had given them any point of contact with our condition. Many poor people, like this woman, feel that the well-to-do move in a totally different world from theirs and neither think nor care what is happening to them. And unfortunately a king with sackcloth next his flesh is rare enough to be noted even on Bible

pages. There are enough people in comfortable circumstances, who spend enormous sums on their own pleasure, or adornment, or comfort, or amusement, utterly regardless of the squalor and misery within a few blocks of their luxurious dwellings, and of the appalling need, not for charity—although relief is still necessary—but for intelligent, self-sacrificing, time-consuming personal service along a hundred lines of social betterment—there are enough such callous people to give the poor, whose children, if not boiled and eaten, are all too often needlessly sacrified to preventable disease, or morally ruined by exposure to accursed temptations, cause to think that under the garments of wealth is a heart of stone. But there are still these kingly souls, and we, rich and poor alike, meet them. They amaze us by the hearing they give our story, and sometimes by the insight with which they detect what we would like to say without making us say it.

Later we usually find out some reason for their sympathy. Unconsciously they draw aside their garments sufficiently to let us catch sight of sackcloth. Thackeray writes,

"The Samaritan who rescued you most likely has been robbed and has bled in his day, and it is a wounded arm that bandages yours when bleeding." You remember the touching incident in the history of our English literature when Coleridge, in his most necessitous days, received through a publisher the offer of five hundred pounds from another man of letters much his junior, DeQuincey; behind that unexpected generosity was the tragic fact that both men were bound together by a similar adversity—both victims of a drug. The heart that goes out to ours knoweth its own bitterness. The man who proves a comfort to us has been comforted in his own affliction with the comfort which he offers. The person who is able to put his finger with infallible accuracy on all our sore spots, saying, "Thou ailest, here and here," has had an intimate acquaintance of which we were not aware with our malady. We can live with people a long time, as these Samaritans had spent the tedious weeks and months of that awful siege with their king, and not know them. Life's business compels men to wear the conventional robes of place and work;

it requires some special happening to make them rend their garments and let us see what is next their flesh. The first attention they give us may be gratifying; but how close they draw us to them when we see the sackcloth!

Have you guessed already where this line of thought was taking us? We men, with our incurable religious instinct, have always believed in a God above, and in large measure responsible for, His world. We have pictured Him as best we could through the highest words in our human vocabulary, and found Him a reality corresponding more or less to our thought of Him. We have believed that He was at least as good as ourselves, and usually we have insisted that He was a great deal better. If any man was thoughtful, God was more considerate. If any man was kind-hearted, God outwent him. If any man was touched with a feeling of his brothers' infirmities, God was more truly afflicted in all our affliction. But it has not been an easy faith to hold in famine times. When unspeakable horrors were taking place on earth, and the heavens smiled serenely; when men have been racked

with pain, or tortured by cruel wrong, or broken with bitter sorrow, and the sun has gone on shining upon the evil and the good, and silence has been the only reply to men's agonizing voices, it has seemed a mockery to go on trusting that a heart up yonder really feels with us. It has been most difficult to "bear without resentment the divine reserve." And after all the universe is so vast, and if there be a God over all, He must be so totally unlike us, so remote in His infinite thoughts and world-embracing plans, that it appears absurd to imagine that He thinks of and cares about what is most momentous to us; it must be so trifling to Him.

> Is not God in the height of heaven?
> And behold the height of the stars, how high they are!

We have all of us shared the mood with which Eliphaz charges Job:

> And thou sayest, What doth God know?

It is the men in Job's circumstances, in the piteous circumstances of these women in Samaria, whose faith has been most

severely strained. In an awful period of hunger in the early days of the colonists in Virginia, known afterwards as "The Starving-Time," a man walked up to the fire before his neighbors and flung his Bible into the flames, declaring that it contained nothing but lies. And you recall the incident in George Eliot's novel where Janet Dempster, after a scene with her drink-maddened husband, is pushed out of doors and sits shivering on the cold step.

With the door shut upon her past life, and the future black and unshapen before her as the night, the scenes of her childhood, her youth and her painful womanhood, rushed back upon her consciousness, and made one picture with her present desolation. The petted child taking her newest toy to bed with her—the young girl, proud in strength and beauty, dreaming that life was an easy thing, and that it was pitiful weakness to be unhappy—the bride, passing with trembling joy from the outer court to the inner sanctuary of woman's life—the wife, beginning her initiation into sorrow, wounded, resenting, yet still hoping and forgiving—the poor bruised woman, seeking through weary years the one refuge of despair, oblivion:—Janet seemed to herself all these in the same moment that she was conscious of being seated on the cold stone under the shock of a new misery. Her mother had sometimes said that troubles were

sent to make us better and draw us nearer God. What mockery that seemed to Janet! Her troubles had been sinking her lower from year to year, pressing upon her like heavy, fever-laden vapors, and perverting the very plenitude of her nature into a deeper source of disease. And if there was any Divine Pity she could not feel it; it kept aloof from her, it poured no balm into her wounds, it stretched out no hand to bear up her weak resolve, to fortify her fainting courage.

You recall the sequel. Janet's wretchedness leads a clergyman, Mr. Tryan, to rend his reserve and let her know the story of his own soul's passage through a similar land of great darkness. And in it you remember he had been found by One, tempted in all points like himself.

We may have been familiar with the story of Jesus all our days, but each time we look to Him, we are amazed to find something we had not known before. Each experience through which we pass, each need that drives us to Him, proves a key that opens up a new treasure-room and admits us to more of His unsearchable riches. There are portraits which give the impression that the face is turned straight towards you, and the eyes follow you as you move, from whatever

angle in a room you look at them. It is so with Jesus Christ. From whatever point in life's whole round of occurrences we face Him, we seem to be met by eyes fastened directly on us and with such a look of recognition as may pass between friends who have endured together some strange and secret experience, and are through it enabled to understand each other completely.

Milton, in his little-read poem on the Passion, describes Jesus' death in the striking line:

> Then lies Him meekly down fast by His brethren's side.

It seems to be a true account of what Christ has done in every situation in which we find ourselves, as well as in death. It is not that He has been in precisely the same circumstances as ours, any more than the king had gone through the identical starvation and desperate devising of these two women; but His experiences seem always sufficiently close to ours to give Him a fellow feeling. "Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases." Origen records a saying of His unmentioned in the Gospels, which sounds

genuine: "For them that were sick I was sick." And when from the cross we hear Him crying, "Forsaken!" there seems no depth of doubt or wretchedness which He has not sounded. Nobody turns to Christ from any experience, however extraordinary, and feels that there is no point of contact between himself and Him. There is a picture by Francia in the Louvre representing a man bent in pain at the foot of the cross, but looking up to this inscription, "Maiora sustinuit Ipse." "Greater things Himself hath endured."

> And every cross grows light beneath
> The shadow, Lord, of Thine.

In answer to each need of ours, His garments are rent, and behold, there is sackcloth within upon His flesh.

But all this is only saying that by recalling a most touching Figure from the past, gazing at the loveliest portrait in history, we find in the career of the Man of Sorrows that which makes Him kin to us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, the triumphant Sharer of our doubts and pains and defeats. It is no small thing to know that

One like us has borne all and been undismayed; but what has this Man's sympathy, however touching, to do with the invisible Lord of heaven and earth? Edgar Tryan and Janet Dempster in George Eliot's story did not stop with a Figure of the past. Through His heart they looked in at the divine, at the love of God. The understanding of our case, the feeling for our difficulties, the tears for our wretchedness, which we discover in Jesus, are not His merely; for every man who lets the sympathy of Christ uphold him, they prove none other than the understanding and fellow feeling and pity of the Most Highest. In Jesus the garments of this inscrutable universe have been rent and we see what is underneath all—Love. "I am poor and needy, but the Lord thinketh upon me." "He counteth the number of the stars; He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds." It may seem incredible. One can heap up arguments against its probability. But however it seem, countless others have tried and found that it is true. And when we call to the King of the universe, who appears so distant from our

interests and unfamiliar with our circumstances, let us go to Calvary where hangs One like ourselves and look at Him crucified. There comes to us from Him a sympathy that proves the strongest and wisest force with which we are anywhere in touch, and that which is strongest and wisest, is for us divinest, is God.

It is not that God can do everything He would like to for us. Even He must sometimes say, "Whence shall I help thee?" Neither out of his threshing-floor nor wine-press can He supply the impossible. He can do no more for us than love can do. But love can sympathize. In Jesus the veil of the temple is rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and as we look, behold, there is sackcloth within upon the heart of God.

X

THE CHRISTIAN THOUGHT OF GOD

John 14: 9, 28. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. The Father is greater than I.

George Eliot describes Adam Bede as possessing "that mental combination which is at once humble in the region of mystery, and keen in the region of knowledge," and she mentions in the same breath the depth of his reverence and his hard common sense. It is a description of an ideally balanced mind for religion, for it enables its possessor to appreciate the two aspects of the Christian thought of God—His certainty and His mystery. We know what He is in Jesus, so that we trust and adore Him as entirely Christlike; and we look off from Jesus to God's vastness in which He is more than, but not different from, Him. The Christian God is like Jesus and greater.

He is like Jesus. Think a moment what we mean by "God"—the Force back of and

in the universe, the Mind that planned and controls planets in their courses and the more unruly minds of the millions of men, the Beauty of whom the loveliest sights of earth are but fragmentary glimpses. Then think who Jesus was—a child, born to a carpenter and his wife in a stable, reared in a small Galilean village and laboring at His father's trade, appearing for a few months as an innovating religious teacher with a handful of illiterate followers, arrested as a charlatan and revolutionary by the authorities in Church and State, and executed as a criminal. God is like Jesus; how startling the statement is when one appreciates its implications!

Is it true? Can it be proved?

As men looked at the sea, it occurred to one of them that the water could carry him, and he formed a mental image of a boat; perhaps at the start it was simply a log to which he clung. Another had a better image, and a dugout or a raft was constructed. A third evolved a canoe, and so on down to the scientifically calculated lines of the last huge Atlantic liner and the swiftest modern yacht. The history of

navigation calls up a strange medley of images—the countless predecessors and successors of Noah's ark—scows and junks, triremes and galleys, schooners and steamers, in which men have trusted themselves on the face of the waters. There is a long series of experiments and a large experience behind a vessel in which you and I embark today.

As men looked off over the infinite sea of Being, they felt that there was Something or Someone there who could carry them; and they have formed mental images of that Someone. The image which Jesus employed when He thought of God, and employed so effectively that He Himself became to His followers the embodiment of the God He trusted, and so their Image of the invisible Father, had behind it the religious experiments of all the race, and in particular of Israel's patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, sages, and has since His day been tested by the experience of many thousand Christians. He improved on all His predecessors, exactly as a designer of ships avails himself of the knowledge of all who have tried his task before him and attempts to advance

on them. Since Jesus' day Christians have not been able to improve on Him, simply because they have found no deficiencies in His image of God. When we say that God is Jesus-like, we leave nothing to be desired.

Men's images of boats have been successful; they have sailed the seas. The image that best conforms to the necessities of winds and waves, that enables them most skilfully to steer into the winding channel of the harbor, and to outride most safely the storm, has displaced the less satisfactory. Its workableness has been the proof of its correspondence to the eternal facts of the universe in the mighty deep.

Men's images of God, from the crudest fetish to the figure of the Son of man, have worked. Through them men have drawn from the Unseen inestimable inspiration, wisdom, comfort, strength, love. The image through which they have received most has naturally supplanted less effective conceptions. The image that best conforms to the facts of the Invisible, that most exactly corresponds to the character of God, demonstrates its truth by its workableness, its results. If by adoring, trusting, obeying

God in Jesus we find ourselves most enrichingly related to the Unseen, is not the Jesus-likeness of God proven, as far as proof can go? If any man replies, "I simply cannot believe it; the God of all cannot be pictured in a Man," we can only ask him to try and see. The effectiveness of designs for vessels cannot be tested by sitting about a table and discussing drawings on paper; the conclusive demonstration is a trial trip in all sorts of weather. The Christlikeness of God cannot be argued; its conclusive evidence awaits those who venture out on life's enterprise confiding in and devoted to God in the face of Jesus Christ.

When we assert, as we do at this Christmas season, that whoever sees Jesus, sees the Father, we mean the Man Christ Jesus, not the Babe of Bethlehem. This Baby, however infinite His promise, cannot reveal God fully. Had Herod succeeded in murdering the Child of Mary, or had the Boy died at twelve, or had Jesus been taken from us any time short of Calvary, we should not have had the final disclosure of God in a human life. The incarnation is not complete in the manger-cradle. Jesus'

embodiment of God was an achievement at which both He and His Father wrought together for the three and thirty stainless years of His earthly life. Clement of Alexandria says, "With the most perfect ease He made God shine on us"; we may not be conscious of the effort but there is a completely engrossing effort both on Jesus' and on His Father's part in His revealing God to us and in God's revealing Himself to us through Him.

It cost Jesus constant effort. We do the Son of God a gross injustice if we think He simply had to let Himself be sent to earth, and be here what He could not but be. There was certainly something unique about Him to begin with. There is an undeniable truth in the stories of His coming down from heaven or of His miraculous birth, however you may put into prose sentences the religious poetry of the Gospels. He was unique to start with; but we must be careful in allowing for this singularity not to represent Him as without our handicaps and so attaining goodness with an ease impossible to us. That is to rob ourselves of One made and tempted in all points like unto His

brethren. Jesus with the inevitable limitations of all human beings, limitations of ignorance and of weakness, fought for Himself and for us the good fight of faith, wrought in patience and self-control and consecration at His Father's business, and was "made perfect" (to use the pregnant New Testament phrase), became the Image of the Most High, the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

And it cost the Father an effort. The conventional representation of the disclosure of God in Jesus does the Father a gross injustice. His love is supposed to be shown in letting His Son leave Him for a few years and become a poor human being in the earth. But Jesus would have stoutly refused assent to the statement that He had left the Father. He was no prodigal here, nor in a far country. Everything about Him in our world—sun and rain, grass of the field and birds of the air—was God's; people were children of the Most High. And as for His abiding contact with the Father, how could it be more strongly put than: "I am not alone, because the Father is with Me"; "The Father abiding in Me"? The Father's part

in the incarnation was not in allowing His Son to leave Him, but rather in constantly accompanying Him, in going in Him. We speak of an author's writing himself into his book, of a leader's throwing his life into a movement, of a workman's putting his heart into his work. Paul said of the runaway slave, Onesimus, on whom he had lavished his thought and pains, when he sent him back to his master, Philemon, "Whom I have sent back to thee in his own person, that is my very heart." God through all the years of the growth and the work of the Son of Mary put Himself into Him. Answering the continuous trust of the Son of man was the constant self-giving of the Father to Him. There was an Advent of the Father at Christmas, as truly as an Advent of the Son.

The result of Jesus' trustful obedience and the Father's self-impartation was the disclosure of God in a human life, God in Christ. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father."

It has been one of the tragedies of history, perhaps the greatest of all tragedies, that Christians have loudly proclaimed the deity

of Jesus, and kept on picturing God as in many respects unlike Him. But it has always been and is orthodox Christianity to insist that deity in the Father and in the Son is the same deity; Jesus is like the Father and the Father is like Jesus. No statement about God that represents Him as thinking or feeling or doing anything in the least out of harmony with the thought and heart and purpose of Jesus can be accepted for one moment by Christians as true. It makes no difference whether the statement be made by a Bible writer, or whether it has been accepted by the entire Christian Church for centuries. Anything attributed to God in past, present or future, which a Christian is convinced is unlike Jesus, he must refuse to believe, or he ceases to be a Christian. We must

> Correct the portrait by the living Face,
> Man's God by God's God in the mind of man.

This is the Christian Gospel, the good news of God. We look at the Life which appeared in Bethlehem and reached its climax on Calvary. He is the Best we can imagine, the Loveliest we can conceive. He

is everything we want of goodness, and patience, and forgiveness, and courage. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. My God and your God is all that I am; My Father and your Father is trying to give Himself to you, as He gave Himself to Me. Will you follow Me, and let Him put Himself in His Spirit more and more into you, as I received Him in His fullness bodily?"

God is like Jesus *and more.* "The Father is greater than I." This is a saying that we seldom speak of, largely because it is difficult for us to make anything out of it. Jesus means so infinitely much to us that we feel no need of and cannot conceive a greater than He. And it is puzzling to think out in what this superior greatness consists. Is it power? Can we fancy a force greater than the love drawing us from the cross? If there be such a force, why did not God use it, instead of employing something inferior to save the world? Is it wisdom? Could anything be wiser than this same disclosure of love at Calvary? Is it goodness? Can God be better than the Crucified? But we must not forget that above even the

Crucified was One before whom He bowed and to whom He looked up with boundless reverence. We look up with Him, and we feel ourselves in the presence of mystery which renders our words futile. This "greaterness" of the Father, which we cannot precisely phrase, emphasizes that illimitableness of God which we need to keep in mind whenever we think of Him. A French mystic has said that to define God is to end Him—"Le Dieu défini est le Dieu fini." When we have said everything we can about the Most High, we have to lower our heads and add, "He is all this and much more." This is Jesus' invariable attitude. The young ruler addressed Him as Good Master. "Why callest thou Me good? none is good save One, even God." "Away from all that you see to admire and revere in Me to Him who is the same but greater."

The ocean sends up a bay into our coast. We use it as a harbor; we moor our boats in it; we sail around it again and again, until we are familiar with its shore line; we build a house beside it, and grow accustomed to looking it over a dozen times a day. The water in the bay is one with the water in

the ocean; it rises and falls with the tides of the great sea. The ocean is in the bay, so far as the ocean can be contracted within such dimensions. We bathe in it without fear, and sail on it with safety; and after we have lived beside it for years feel that we understand it; it is our own familiar bay.

That is a picture of God in Jesus. He holds as much of God as a limited human life can contain. The life, the heart, the mind, the will of God in Him are identical with the life, the heart, the mind, the will of the infinite and eternal Father, Lord of heaven and earth. We can come close to Him as our Brother; we can enter into His faith, His hope, His purpose, His sacrifice, and become His friends. After years of obedient and trusting companionship, we say, "I understand and know Jesus Christ." That means, "I understand and know God," for he that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.

There is a sense in which we never get to know a bay. Every time we sail over its expanse we catch some new glimpse of beauty we had not noticed before, some effect of sunlight or of cloud or of wind-

tossed wave or of moon-silvered water. There are wonders of life within its limited area that would keep us exploring and studying them all our days to classify them and understand them scientifically, and marvels in shell and fish and plant to afford us some new interest seemingly endless.

It is so with the exhaustless beauty and unsearchable riches of Jesus. One can scarcely read an incident in the Gospels without finding something he had not noticed before. Paul, who understood Jesus as well and better than any follower Christ has ever had, constantly feels his vocabulary beggared in trying to describe Him, and is reduced to such expressions as, "The love of Christ which passeth knowledge," "the unsearchable riches of Christ," "God's unspeakable gift."

But the bay is not the ocean. That is all that the bay is and more. We look out across the bay to the bar at its mouth, and let our imagination sail away over the limitless stretch of waters beyond, fancy the many diverse lands which the sea touches, picture the commerce of the world crossing its markless paths, puzzle our minds with

the strange and marvellous contents of its vast recesses, hear at times the roar of its surf as its waves come pounding in at the harbor's mouth, and let its incalculable vastness awe us.

"My Father is greater than I." There is a boundlessness to our thought of God, of whom and through whom and unto whom are all things, the Life and Lord of this and all worlds. We fancy His personal fellowship not with a few hundred people, but with every life that has ever lived, each born in His thought, watched and led by His love, accompanied in the darkest experience of sorrow and the lowest hell of sin—God, the great uniting sea with His contact for ever and ever and ever with every soul. We picture the commerce of all minds and hearts passing through Him, the thoughts of all men known to Him, the loves of all men felt by Him. We puzzle our minds with the inestimable treasures in His deep places—His patience, which has borne the ignorance, the folly, the obstinacy, of all His children through all their generations; His resourcefulness, which has never been defeated by man's thwarting His designs; His love,

which in every age has suffered with and for every child of His to redeem him, even as Jesus suffered once on Calvary. At times we hear a voice, like the voice of many waters, the voice of the greatness, the majesty, the holiness of our God. "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father; the Father is greater than I."

Religion means little to many of us simply because our idea of God is neither interesting nor attractive. The Christian thought of God convinces the mind and constrains the heart. Think of Jesus—the Babe, the Boy, the Man, the Teacher, the Friend, the Saviour, the Warrior with evil, the Sufferer, the Lord of life. Unto us this Child is born, unto us this Son is given. And all that He was, our Father has always been and is and always will be. We get the Father in the Son. We have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But even this is not all. Up and away from the unspeakable Gift we look to an even wealthier Giver. We can let our thought stretch itself and come to no end, our love fly out and find no resting place. "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the

wideness of the sea." The water of the sea is never different from the water of life in the bay, but oh, the infiniteness of its reaches, its immeasurable expanse! We are lost in wonder, love and praise.

And this God, like Jesus and greater, is our God forever and ever; the God in whom we trust, for whom we sacrifice, with whom we toil and whom we seek to embody in a whole world's life, so that He is all in all.

XI

FAITH AND GROWING KNOWLEDGE

Genesis 32: 26. And He said, Let Me go, for the day breaketh.

Psalm 139: 18. When I awake, I am still with Thee.

The presence of God and clear daylight seemed incompatible to the Patriarch Jacob. While the blackness of night wrapped him in its mysteries God was vividly near, wrestling with him, laming him, within his grasp as he clung to Him desperately; but as the morning broke the divine Visitant appeared to be trying to get away. When the sun dispelled the shadows and exposed the familiar sights of earth, he expected to find nothing underneath his arms and to see empty space, where in the darkness he had felt the moving, breathing, struggling Combatant. The first streaks of dawn brought the voice, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh."

This feeling that light banishes God, that to see clearly is to lose sight of Him, often recurs in the experience of religious people.

In the world of startling surprises into which a child is born, he finds little difficulty in imagining the unseen beings of whom he is told, and living in their actual society. The Santa Claus, to whom he posts a Christmas letter in the chimney, is so real that he can readily be induced to think that the wind he hears blowing over the chimney-top is the swift passing of an airy postman carrying the mail to the kindly patron of good children. The invisible God, to whom he addresses his nightly "Now I lay me down to sleep" and says, "Our Father, which art in heaven," is as sensibly at hand. The pictures children form of God vary with what they are taught and the impressions they receive, but the sense of His actuality they themselves supply. Mrs. Browning's lines, in which she describes a child's thought of God, put this graphically:

They say that God lives very high;
But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God: and why?

And if you dig down in the mines
  You never see Him in the gold;
Though from Him all that glory shines.

God is so good, He wears a fold
  Of heaven and earth across His face—
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

But still I feel that His embrace
  Slides down by thrills, through all things made,
Through sight and sound of every place:

As if my tender mother laid
  On my shut lips her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said
  "Who kissed you through the dark, dear guesser?"

But it was through the dark and when the child was but half awake that the kiss was felt. As he goes to school and gets explanations for things that were mysterious to him before, God inevitably becomes less present. If he has fancied a divine Hand setting the moon and stars in the evening sky, just as the lamplighter turns on the street lights, God's share in the beauty of night disappears when he confronts a globe and is shown how the earth revolves about the sun, and the stars become visible simply

because of the absence of sunlight. If he has pictured the rain falling from opened windows in the heavens, after the manner of the early Bible stories, God's part in the tumbling drops is taken away when he learns of the sun's evaporation of water and the formation of clouds. The more he learns, the more everything seems to him to go on without God's having anything to do with it. Mystery gave him a region in which he could easily imagine God as active; but light is breaking on all these shadowy spots, and he does not see God in them any longer. The world he is studying grows more fascinating; the things he sees and does absorb his interest and attention, and he ceases to let his imagination play as he used to; the unseen is forgotten. The Great Companion, who once was as real to him as the people in his own home, seems to be leaving him, saying, "Let Me go, for the day breaketh." He thinks that, when he knows as much as his elders, he will find himself in a godless world. He may be steadily improving in character, overcoming and outgrowing childish weaknesses and faults; but the chances are that the growing boy or girl will pray

less, care less for the Bible and its stories, think less of God, than the child. The world is more interesting, and life is far fuller and richer; but he has lost an indefinable somewhat that gave childhood a mysterious delight.

> There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
> The earth and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.
> It is not now as it hath been of yore:—
> Turn wheresoe'er I may,
> By night or day,
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

And if this is true when the dawn steals on us, it is truer still when the long shadows of early day retreat before the glare of mid-morning. Many a schoolboy, who at fifteen has made a compact with a divine Friend and lived with a keen sense of loyalty to Him, even if his fancy no longer pictured Him with the vividness of childhood, finds himself at college with a world-view in which such a personal relation with the Unseen appears impossible. He has become more

knowing, more clever, more critical. A brilliant, hard light shines on everything. Even the shadows seem no longer obscure to him. The subtle beauty of the universe with its suggestion of the divine has faded out, and life's physical and human facts and problems stare him in the face. He has been taught to think—to think rigorously, coolly, steadily, and the first application of such searching thought to religious convictions usually dissolves them altogether. The daybreak of manhood's knowledge has banished God.

> And now a flower is just a flower:
> Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—
> Simply themselves, uncinct by dower
> Of dyes which, when life's day began,
> Round each in glory ran.

Nor is it alone in transitional stages in our growth that God disappears with the coming of light. It often occurs when we let light in on our own religious experiences. Men are interested today in studying the human soul in its relations to God. Prayer, conversion, revivals, all the movements of our spirits towards the divine, are explored

and charted. This searchlight of investigation has often the effect of obliterating God from the very transaction in which we were most aware of Him. Sudden transformations of character are, perhaps, the most startling and convincing of the manifestations of divine power. A careless and indifferent boy becomes within a month devout and devoted. We are amazed at the rapidity of his development and the completeness of the alteration. A man who yesterday was a brutish sot is overnight turned into a self-controlled, sensitive, responsible husband, father, citizen. We feel ourselves in the presence of superhuman force, and are awed. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But men have not been content to allow the wind to remain an inscrutable secret; they have studied the atmospheric changes which affect air currents, and can tell us with reasonable accuracy whence a breeze has come and whither it goes. Men have probed into the wonders of a change of heart; they have

collected statistics and compiled charts showing that it was natural to expect a growing boy to undergo a transformation in his soul, when body and mind were passing through equally striking changes. They analyze the process which takes place in a redeemed drunkard's brain and relate it to other, somewhat similar, mental changes which remake lives. And this exploration of the subtle occurrences in a soul frequently has the result of robbing the experiences of their divineness. God, who was so keenly felt when the experience was shrouded in obscurity, seems to have vanished, when we examine it in broad day.

Nor is it only the light of investigation which tends to do away with God; the calm light of reflection has a similar effect. That is, perhaps, the explanation of Jacob's experience in our text. When night settled on him at the Jabbok, and he was wondering whether his wily scheme to pacify his less astute brother would succeed, his conscience suddenly gripped him. His sin had found him out. In angry Esau coming to meet him with his band of warriors, his own trickery was returning to plague him. The

divine Wrestler asked insistently, "What is thy name?" compelling the helpless man to look at himself, judge himself, condemn himself. In his shame and fear, bewildered and confused by the troubling and accusing thoughts that rushed upon him, he was vividly aware of God. It is He who opposes him, struggles with him, lames him. But such an emotional strain cannot be indefinitely prolonged: and with the dawn the sight of hills and plain and stream steadied him: his thoughts became quieter: and as he reflected on his experience, lo, God, a few moments before so insistently present, appeared to be going. Have we not been in sufficiently similar circumstances to appreciate the inescapable pressure of God through conscience, and then, as our mind grew calmer and we began to reflect, have we not been surprised at the cool fashion with which we almost smiled at ourselves for having been so wrought up over our iniquities, and finally were we not impressed with the utter remoteness of God, a while before so sensibly in contact with us?

Or the darkness in which men are aware of God's touch upon them may be the valley

of the shadow of a great sorrow. People often surprise us by their calmness under the first shock of grief. It may be that they scarcely realize their loss. Time brings loneliness home. But it is also true that the excitement of sorrow renders the soul acutely sensitive, and God is felt with an unusual intensity. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; *for Thou art with me.*" When the life has readjusted itself after the blow, when it is emerging from the shadowed ravine on to the plain of convention and routine and normal living, there is often a sense of God's disappearance. Arnold's Stagirius prays:

> When the soul, growing clearer,
> Sees God no nearer;
> When the soul, mounting higher,
> To God comes no nigher;
> Save, Oh save!

It is not astonishing that devout people, to whom the sense of God's nearness means everything, are eager to avoid the daybreak of searching knowledge or the light of steady and penetrating thought. "What has the

Church to do with the Academy?" has been a cry raised from Tertullian's day to our own. John Henry Newman complains of "the all corroding, all dissolving skepticism of the intellect in religious inquiries." It has only been a vigorous faith, like Paul's or John's, which willingly proves all things, assured that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Eyes have to grow accustomed to bright sunshine as truly as to darkness before they can see, and the process is much more painful. It requires courage and strength of will to open them, and keep them open, despite the tears that form. Such resolute looking is not disappointed. The seeming fading out of God from the scene will prove to be but blindness due to excess of bright. He covers Himself with light as with a garment and the dazzling robe often conceals Him. It is only after we have familiarized ourselves with the daylight that we make the discovery, "When I awake, I am still with Thee."

The boy passing out of childhood is quitting the world of fancy for the world of fact. He has lost the Deity of his early imagination and must gaze at the God of things

as they are. He disturbs parents and teachers by questioning the Bible stories, the prayers, the simple religious ideas, which once delighted him. Well for him, if their faith is robust enough to enable them to be frank! The reaction from the romance of childhood reduces him to a bald literalist, but he must look steadily at facts until they of themselves awaken his wonder and awe. Through Jesus, no longer a fairylike Being but a Man, facing problems and difficulties like our own, and with a faith we can share, he must become aware of the God and Father of Jesus Christ, and feel Him as real a force as the most indubitable actualities of life.

The college student with his new world-view, with his sense of all-pervasive law, with his necessarily critical attitude towards all things, has a further struggle for faith. He must keep his eyes open on his world-view until they see the fact of religion as clearly as other facts. He must look at laws long enough to see that they are not opaque barriers, but can be looked through to a Personality behind them. Testing all things, he must honestly test Jesus Christ,

using Him as the Image of the invisible Most High, until he knows whether that image be valid or not, whether through Christ he finds fellowship with a God whose reality is certified to him by the guidance, the power, the inspiration, the companionship he derives from Him. If he loses some of his childhood's religion it is lost "in no other way than light is lost in light." Awake to all the knowledge the world can offer, he is still with God.

The man who examines religious experience in prayer, conversion and the like, and finds investigation dulling faith, because he discovers laws where before was nothing but mystery, is not yet really awake. He must rub his eyes and look again until the marvels of the result wrought through processes which seem ordinary enough, impress him. The clicking of a telegraph receiver sounds to an uninitiated listener the same when it is recording some commonplace or some message of momentous import. It is only by watching what happens when the news is received that he finds out the significance of the sounds which seemed so usual. All the occurrences in the mind of a man under

religious influences may seem very like occurrences under much less exalted stimuli. What do these occurrences make out of him? what does prayer accomplish in him? what is he converted to?—these are the tests which set us in the way of seeing results sufficiently godlike to attest the work of God. With our knowledge of the processes we ought to be able to increase and intensify the results, to coöperate intelligently with God, and in the broad day of knowledge find ourselves in closer harmony with Him.

The Jacob who leaves the Jabbok is less aware of God's presence than the struggler who feels himself at Peniel face to face with God. But his subsequent history shows no more trickery; and is the God who steadily and quietly speaks through a regularly functioning conscience any less actual than the God who wrestled with him in his night of self-accusation and fear? Ought he not to say after every step he has been enabled to take in frankness and sincerity, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved"? Not less but more reflection will make us feel that the conscience, which daily keeps us from moral destruction, is as

marvellous a disclosure of the sublimest Force in the universe—of God—as the occasional bewildering struggle when an outraged conscience assails us with divine compunctions.

The man resuming life's routine after some great experience may feel God slipping from him. The garish light of common day discloses nothing but common things and common people; there is no inkling of the divine Presence on the whole horizon. Let him "awake to soberness righteously, and sin not." Let him consecrate himself to work in the spirit of Jesus while it is day, however commonplace his day seems, and see whether there does not

> shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
> Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

When we seem to lose God because the day is breaking, we shall not find Him again by attempting an impossible retreat into the night, but by advancing into the day with open eyes. The difficulty is that so many have their eyes partially closed. They are not wholly awake—awake to responsibility, awake to the wonder of

common facts, awake to the shining goodness of a life devoted to the purpose of the Son of man. "Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee." Yes, awake to all life's realities, the realities of obligation and of faith among them, and see whether the figure of Jesus Christ which perhaps has faded into obscurity does not shine out again as the Light of life; and, loyally following Him, see if through His face there does not stream the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, who is with us not intermittently but always, not in the shadows only but in the broad day; see if we do not possess "waking thoughts more rich than happiest dreams."

XII

THE FALLACY OF ORIGINS

John 7: 27. Howbeit we know this Man whence He is: but when the Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is.

John 9: 29. We know that God hath spoken unto Moses: but as for this Man, we know not whence He is.

Here are two apparently opposite reasons for rejecting the claims of Jesus. Some refused to recognize Him as the Christ because they knew where He came from: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? We know this Man, whence He is: but when the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence He is." Others objected to Him because they knew nothing of His antecedents. Had He come from a distinguished family in Jerusalem, and had He possessed an influential backing, they might at least have listened to Him; but who knew anything about this young peasant from Galilee? "As for this Man, we know not whence He is."

Their objections to Jesus represent two

very common tendencies in men's religious feelings. On the one hand, that which seems to us altogether inexplicable we are wont to attribute to God. Legal contracts often contain a list of all conceivable catastrophes—fire, disease, accident, shipwreck, war—and conclude with the phrase "or act of God," to cover a humanly unforeseeable and unpreventable occurrence, as though in that, but not in these other events, God's activity was to be recognized. If some good fortune befalls us without our planning or working for it, we call it "a special providence," while that which we bring about by our own forethought and toil does not impress us as providential. The Israelites spoke of the manna which they collected in the desert and for which they performed no labor as "corn of heaven," but the bread which they made from the grain they grew in Canaan, although far better bread, was not called heavenly. When an idea suddenly comes into our minds without any apparent connection with our previous train of thought, and comes with some force, we say, "I don't know how I came to think of it; it seems as though God put it into my

mind"; while in courses of action which we think out very carefully, we are not vividly conscious of being led by God. "When the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence He is."

On the other hand, whatever comes from a venerated source is apt to seem to us divine, when the identical thing would not convey that impression if it had another origin. If we receive an idea from a Bible verse, we feel that it is God's word to us, but the same thought occurring on the pages of some other book would not produce the same effect. If a stimulus to unselfish service is given us at the Communion table, we accept it as Christ's direct inspiration; if it comes from some story of need read in the daily newspaper, we are not likely to think of Christ as having had anything to do with it. "We know that God hath spoken to Moses: but as for this Man, we know not whence He is."

In other words, origins, the whence of things, have a determining effect upon our attitude to the things themselves.

We are just emerging from a half-century which has been characterized by marvellous

scientific discoveries. The scientific mind is particularly interested in investigating the whence of things. The most influential book of the last century bears the significant title, "The Origin of the Species." And these inquiries into origins have come into conflict with the religious feelings of which we have been speaking.

It was a shock to man's self-esteem to have his beginnings probed, and to be told that his ancestry was so closely akin to that of the beasts. William Watson puts the scientific view and the impression which its statement makes upon us in the lines:

> In cave and bosky dene
> Of old there crept and ran
> The gibbering form obscene
> That was and was not man.
> The desert beasts went by
> In fairer covering clad;
> More speculative eye
> The couchant lion had,
> And goodlier speech the birds, than we when we began.
>
> A soul so long deferred
> In his blind brain he bore,
> It might have slept unstirred
> Ten million noontides more.

Yea, round him darkness might
Till now her folds have drawn,
O'er that enormous night
So casual came the dawn,
Such hues of hap and hazard Man's Emergence wore!

The same methods which some scientists were employing upon human origins, others used in the study of the beginnings of religious institutions. The Bible was examined, and it came as a startling, and to many an unwelcome, surprise to be told that the first five books of the Old Testament were not written by Moses, but are a compilation by many hands of material from half a dozen or more centuries; that the Psalms are not the poems of David, but, like our own hymnal, a collection of hymns from a number of authors, mostly unknown, gathered together at different times for the worship of the Jewish Temple; that many of the prophetic books—Isaiah, for instance—contain not the messages of a single preacher, but the sermons of several who lived perhaps in different centuries. On the one hand, people had got in the way of thinking of the Bible as God's very Word

to such a degree that they disliked having it analyzed by these rigorous methods, and did not care to connect it with human experiences. When they were told how its books were put together, edited, revised, like other books, it seemed to detract from the Bible's sanctity. On the other hand, the connection of particular books with revered names—Genesis and the 90th Psalm with Moses, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs with Solomon, Lamentations with Jeremiah, the Fourth Gospel with the Apostle John—had appeared to add to their prestige. To be told that these men were not their writers was disconcerting. "We know that God spake to Moses, and Solomon, and Jeremiah, and the Apostle John, but as for these anonymous authors and editors, we know not whence they are."

Religious customs, like the Sabbath, were investigated and found to have existed in earlier and cruder faiths than Israel's. And at once men asked "If the Sabbath was an ancient Babylonian institution, how is it of divine authority for us?"

Doctrines were put to a similar test. A generation ago it was commonly thought

that the theological ideas of nineteenth century Christians, like the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, were identical with those of the first century, that the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Thirty-Nine Articles were accurate reproductions of the beliefs of Jesus and Paul. Historical study convinced scholars that, while through all the centuries Christians have had similar religious experiences, have been one in their trust in God, their loyalty to Jesus Christ, their sense of His forgiving love and redeeming power and inspiring Presence, each generation has set forth its experience in forms of its own. The doctrine of the Trinity is not in the New Testament; but the experiences of God as Father, revealed in Christ, a present inspiration, which afterwards were expressed in the doctrine, are there. Paul's explanation of the cross was couched in symbolic language that meant something to the men of his day, but which meant something different to the Middle Ages and something different still to the Reformers. But men have been upset by this historical investigation. "If Paul thought thus and so, I either want to

think it exactly as he did, or it has no authority for me. We know that God has spoken to Paul; but as for these modern theologians, we know not whence they are."

Latterly, the origin of Jesus Himself has been under discussion. How are we to think of His Preëxistence before Bethlehem? Had He a personal, conscious life in heaven, or did He exist simply in the thought of God, the sort of existence spoken of in the phrase in the Revelation where the Lamb is said to have been "slain from the foundation of the world"? Others took up the question of the virgin birth. Is it literal, prose history; or a first-century way of expressing that these Christians discovered unique spirituality in Jesus?

These questions are all as to origins: "Whence came this part of the Bible, this religious custom, this doctrine? Whence came Jesus Christ?"

In the Reformation period it was a burning question how Christ was present in the Lord's Supper, and one of the greatest of English theologians, the judicious Richard Hooker, wrote: "I wish that men would more give themselves to meditate what we

have by the sacrament and less to dispute of the manner how." And again, "What these elements are in themselves it skilleth not, it is enough that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ, His promise in witness hereof sufficeth, His word He knoweth which way to accomplish; why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this, 'O my God Thou art true, O my soul thou art happy!'"

The "how" of anything never seemed important to Jesus. The man in His parable who planted the seed was altogether ignorant of its process of growth. "The seed sprang up and grew, he knew not how." And like a sensible man while it was growing he slept and rose and went about his business. He got the harvest without knowing how it had grown. Jesus was indifferent to origins: by their fruits, not by their roots, ye shall know them.

A few summers ago as I walked into the hall in the Vatican where the Apollo Belvedere stands, and was seating myself to feast my eyes on that glorious piece of sculpture, a fellow countrywoman who was being con-

ducted with a party of tourists through the gallery by a garrulous guide, seeing me engrossed in this statue, condescendingly turned back and informed me, presumably to save me from wasting my time, "He says that it's not original." She was surprised and no doubt thought me ungrateful when I continued to look at it. "Beauty," as Emerson said of the Rhodora, "is its own excuse for being." Who cares whence the Apollo came, whether it was copied, as the guidebooks say, from a bronze original, whether it was carved in the third or the fourth or some other century B. C.? These are all interesting details for the scholar, and matters which he can investigate unfettered by anyone's preconceived notions. But

> A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness.

It is

> An endless fountain of immortal drink
> Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

It is refreshing to hear among the conflicting voices in the chapters in John which contain the disputes over Jesus' origin this

clear, somewhat sarcastic, but most sane speaker: "Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence He is, and yet He opened mine eyes. If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

It is right that scholars, consecrated to truth, should with the utmost freedom and thoroughness investigate everything connected with our Christian faith. It is right that the results of their scholarship should be embodied to a far greater extent than at present in the study of our Bible schools. It is right that Christian fathers and mothers should read books which present these results in untechnical form so that they shall not commit the crime of teaching their children things which they must later unlearn, and perhaps unlearn in a spiritual crisis which may cost them a serious struggle. It is every way right that we all should strive not merely to be earnest but to be intelligent, to know everything that we can know about our Bibles, our religious customs, our doctrines, above all about our Lord. It is right that the Church should honor, as it has not and does not always do, those who devote their lives to painstaking study. It

is right that we who believe that our God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all, that our Lord Jesus is the Truth, and in Him are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, should hold our minds open, expect to receive new ideas, be prepared constantly to readjust our thought so that it grows broader and deeper and higher with the years. But we are not left to sit at the doors of distinguished scholars and wait to hear their results before we know what to believe. The beggar, blind from his birth, was as competent to judge of the worth of Jesus as Nicodemus, or any savant in Jerusalem. "Herein is the marvel, He opened mine eyes."

Take the Bible. It is most interesting to learn the results of modern scholarship, to know as one reads the Fortieth Chapter of Isaiah, for instance, with its "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people," that the words were spoken to discouraged exiles in Babylon by a great prophet who did his work some one hundred and fifty years after Isaiah, who spoke while Jerusalem was still in its glory; that the Book of Daniel was written to cheer and keep steadfast the

Jews under the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B. C.; that the Fourth Gospel is not a history like the other three, but a spiritual interpretation of Jesus seen through a remarkable man's religious experience. But all this knowledge of backgrounds and literary details is after all by the way. Long before they were known the Bible was a light to men's feet and their inspiration to faith, hope and love. "Herein is the marvel" that this Book opens eyes to see God, to see ourselves as we are and as we should be, to see God's purpose for the world He made, rules and loves. How much inspiration are we getting out of the Bible? Is it our daily companion? Are we letting it open our eyes to our duty, our peace, our exceeding joy? Through however various ways these books have been put together, whether we know or do not know whence they are, they could not do what they have done and what they are doing, were they not from God.

Take the Sabbath. The word itself, according to Babylonian scholars, and the testimony of the tablets, seems to indicate that it existed as a day of good or evil omen

long before Abraham, and that the Hebrews took it, like many other customs, from Babylonia and remodelled it to fit their religious beliefs. Its lowly beginning in the midst of primitive superstitions is nothing against it. We are told that our practice of shaking hands began in the fear of primitive man. When he met an acquaintance he took hold of his hand so that he could not draw his weapon and kill him. That humble, altogether unfriendly ancestry does not hinder us from using the clasping of hands as the symbol of friendship, and as an act in the marriage service. Through it we express to our friends our sympathy, our encouragement, our love. The Sabbath has a long history behind it, and our Christian Sunday is no more the Babylonian or even the Jewish Sabbath, than our handshake is the handshake of two mutually suspicious savages. Evolution is God's method of developing His best creations. We who take the day as a Sabbath made over and glorified as the Lord's Day, the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection, to be used in raising our brethren and ourselves into harmony with His life, find its value. Herein is the

marvel that so used it opens our eyes. Life's obligations, possibilities, glories in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ have, as a matter of personal history, been made more clear to us by our keeping this day holy. We covet its privileges for everyone in the community. We are anxious to see our complex social life so adjusted that every man, whatever his trade, gets some sort of Sabbath, some Lord's day in each week, which shall be his high day. The custom has its authority for us not from its origin but from its practically discovered value. When we read the first chapter of Genesis, where it is said that He who worketh hitherto Himself rested, we may find the language a poetic and picturesque way of stating a truth, but a truth none the less, that a Sabbath is part of the ideal life for our Father and His children.

Take any doctrine. There were plants long before there was any botany. The trees and shrubs were growing on this campus before scientists put out labels to let us know how we who rejoice in their beauty are to classify them in our thought. Theology is the attempt to form a clear

opinion of our religious experiences. As Sidney Lanier says of the laws of poetry:

> As the poet mad with heavenly fires
> Flings men his song white-hot, then back retires,
> Cools heart, broods o'er the song again, inquires,
> Why did I this, why that? and slowly draws
> From Art's unconscious act Art's conscious laws,

so, without knowing just what we are doing, we trust in God, follow Jesus Christ, feel the inspiration of His Spirit prompting us to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God, to spend and be spent for those who need us. We pray, we hope, we sacrifice. Then we try to think it all out: Who is this God whom we trust? What control has He over the world, over us? Who is this Christ we follow? What is His relation to God, to us? What is this Spirit we feel within us? Botany differs from century to century as men learn more; but the plants and trees remain the same.

No! not quite the same. The scientific study of plants gives us skilled cultivators, who actually make the plants different, more fruitful, more lovely. Theology opens our eyes. The thoughtful study of our

experiences shows us how to improve those experiences, to get closer to God, to grow more like Christ, to be freer children of the Spirit. All Christian doctrines have humble beginnings, because the religious life began long before the perfect experience of God in Christ. One finds the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, in some form in almost every religion. The form must continually change, in order to express the ever growing experience; but the test of any doctrine is entirely simple and within the reach of the lowliest Christian. Does this thought of God, of Christ, of His cross, of His companionship with me, of the Church, of the Kingdom, of the future life, open my eyes so that I walk more intimately and clearly with my Father in the spirit of my Master Christ? Do not despise doctrines because similar ideas are found in all the faiths of the world, degraded and exalted. Try the doctrine by using it. If it is of no service, let it go. If it opens our eyes, thank God for it.

Take Jesus Christ Himself, His origin is shrouded in mystery. How we are to think of Him before His appearance as a Babe

in Mary's arms, how we are to conceive of His entrance into the world, may be quite insoluble. Some may take New Testament phrases literally, others in some other way. What matters? However He came here, here He is. Look at Him. If there be a God whom we could love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, is not this Man His embodiment? If there be an Ideal to which we would have our lives, and the lives of all our brethren conform, can we think of a higher than He? If we trust and follow Him, do we find ourselves dissatisfied, longing for some clearer Light, some warmer Love, some loftier Inspiration, some richer, usefuller, stronger Life? Or do we find ourselves saying,

> Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
> More than all in Thee I find?

We cannot prove His miracles of long ago; "herein is the marvel, He opened mine eyes." It may possibly be that some of them did not happen, but are parables of spiritual experiences; "one thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." Men may be disputing as to whence He came, we rest secure

in our personal knowledge of what He is. We have done what He told us to do, done it hesitatingly and haltingly and awkwardly like blind men; but in the doing of His will, our eyes were opened. We have a new view of life, live in a new world, see God as our Father, see His Kingdom of justice, mercy and faithfulness as the one purpose we cannot but live and labor to accomplish. And because our vision splendid came through obedience to Jesus, we feel bound to commend Him with all the force we can to every man, to bring every man to a like obedience. Our thoughts of Christ may change; they will surely grow with the experiences of the years and of eternity; but our personal loyalty to Him cannot alter. It is based on one indubitable fact: "herein is the marvel, He opened mine eyes."

If there be one pair of unseeing eyes here this morning, why not let Him open them now? How? Obey Him in the first impulse by which He moves us to do anything for His cause.

XIII

THE REALITY OF GOD

"The living God"—an expression found frequently in both Testaments.

At a class reunion recently two close friends, who had not had a chance to talk together frankly since graduation, were sitting, exchanging their opinions on the deeper things of life, and the conversation gradually drifted around to the subject of religious conviction. One said to the other something as follows:

"When I was in college I used to be bothered by doubts whether all the miracles mentioned in the Bible actually happened; I had trouble believing in the divinity of Christ; some kinds of prayer that I used to hear a certain type of fellow offering in class prayer meetings annoyed me, for I could not see how God needed their reminders and suggestions. But none of these things concern me much at present: it isn't

that I have settled them satisfactorily one way or another; but that a great deal bigger and more fundamental question keeps forcing itself upon me. Is what I call 'God' a label for a real Being, or simply a label for an idea that has come to me partly as an inheritance from the aspirations and superstitions of the past, and partly as an expression for the highest ideal I can imagine?

"I enjoy reading the Bible a good deal more than I used to. Its superb language, its amazing literary skill, the fascination of its stories, the beauty of its thoughts, captivate me. I spend part of every Sunday afternoon reading selections from it to my children, although I usually have hard work dodging some of the questions they put to me. I do not disagree when anybody applies the adjective 'divine' to Jesus; there is no one else who so fully deserves it, and there is no word in the dictionary in my estimation too exalted for Him. The more I study the accounts of His life, the more I look at the results of His influence, the more I think about Him, the more wonderful He appears to me.

"But the trouble is that I cannot see that

the adjective 'divine' belongs to any other Being. I don't quarrel with the divinity of Jesus, but what of the reality of that other He called 'Father'? The truth is that when I get down on my knees to pray, I seem to be talking into empty air. I have an idea in my head that I call 'God'; I suppose it's about the best notion I own, the most beautiful article in my mental furniture. It's a notion that is very stimulating and comforting to lots of people. It's been in my own head so long that I have difficulty in flinging it out of doors, exactly as I hate to give the ash man a bit of furniture that I have looked at all my life. But I don't seem to be able to get away from the feeling that it's just a notion; and this feeling robs it of all value. You can't get up much affection for a mere thought in your own brain. You can't rely on it for anything. There isn't much communion in a one-sided conversation, which makes you feel about as idiotic as when you are caught talking aloud to yourself on the street."

One might well question whether, if religion had no more substantial reality in it than that, it could have survived so long,

and been prized so highly by millions of hard-headed and practically successful men and women. It is a somewhat dubious compliment to pay Jesus to give Him the loftiest adjective in one's vocabulary, but consider Him deluded in His fundamental conviction of the Father, to whose business He devoted His life, in whose personal fellowship He thought He found His strength and hope and peace, and into whose hands He consigned His spirit. The imaginations of little children often impute life to dolls or to some invisible playmate, with whom they carry on long conversations, or go for a walk, or sit down to a meal. But there comes a day when the child looks shamefaced when one alludes to a remark attributed to the doll or mentions the make-believe playmate. A growing acquaintance with life has banished these fancies and compelled the imagination to adjust itself with facts. A make-believe playmate may content a child of four, but at eight he will crave the comradeship of flesh and blood companions. Is it seriously credible that humanity should have satisfied itself for these centuries with a make-believe Deity?

To be sure God is a notion in our heads. He could not be there in any other form; that is the only way in which we exist in each other's heads. We say that we see each other: as a matter of fact, we see a small image, the fraction of an inch in dimensions, on the retina of our eyes, which our nerves take and mysteriously transmute into an idea in our minds. We say that we exchange thoughts: we cram some idea into a word, and let the sound waves carry it to an ear fitted to receive and convey it to another man's mind. Through images and words translating themselves into notions we hold intercourse with one another. And an amazing intercourse it is! Think what freight of influence, of friendship, of love, sight and sound waves, images and words, the mechanism of eyes and tongues and ears and brains is continually delivering! How full of results interperson commerce is!

But the same image and the same word may mean such different things to different people. When a class enters college, a freshman has a confused impression of many faces whom he sees in the recitation room

or at a class meeting. Gradually the impressions assort themselves, and by senior year, while many images that catch his eye are images of men who remain simply classmates, with no very rich personal meaning for him, others are the images of the men who have become his probably best friends for life. Why is it that the same image falling on the eyes of several hundred men has such a different significance for some than for others? All attempts to account for our friendships are unsatisfactory. We usually fall back on such expressions as, "I took to him, and he to me"; "We seemed to hit it off"; "We drew together naturally."

The same word falls upon two sets of ears with such entirely different effects. To one it is a sound in an unknown tongue; to another it carries inestimable love.

Life's circumstances are pretty much the same for everybody—the same changing seasons, the same heat and cold, the same happiness and pain, the same success and failure, the same life and death. The difference in men's lots is inconsiderable compared with the sameness. But how differently people interpret their lives, and how vastly

different is the value they set upon them! It is perhaps natural for the man who, like Macbeth, says,

> Life is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing,

to hold that those who get more out of life simply imagine the more in their own brains; but those who, like Jesus, find a kind and thoughtful Providence even in the fall of a poor, dead sparrow, will hardly be persuaded that the other point of view is correct.

Shall we say that he who gets least or he who gets most out of anything understands it more truly? Have we any more convincing test of the possession of truth, than that which a man can do with what he thinks he possesses? One man understands the truth about electricity sufficiently to devise a lightning rod and protect his house; another can make electricity light his house, carry his voice a thousand miles, bear a message over a continent and under an ocean to the other side of the globe. The first man was in possession of truth as far as he

went, but the second has gone farther and possesses more truth.

From the dawn of history some men have succeeded in getting more out of the world's life than others could see that it contained. They got this "more" because they believed that back of and through it there was an Unseen with which they could establish contact, an Unseen which they found not empty but inhabited. Exactly as men have fellowship with one another through images or words that convey meanings, so through symbols they have had communion with the Invisible. One can recall a long line of such symbols, from the crudest fetish to the Figure of the Son of man, which have spoken to men of the Divine. There has been a struggle for existence and a survival of the fittest among the conceptions of Deity; and in this struggle Jesus has overcome, and is more and more on missionary fields overcoming, all competitors. From His personality we gain more divine impressions than from any other. He awakens in us the most religious response; He calls out our trust, our obedience, our adoration, our love. His image, borne to us by the light

waves in the experiences of His followers through the centuries, brings more that is of supreme worth—inspiration, hope, wisdom, power to change us into His own likeness. Through this image, transmitted by the New Testament pages and the lives of many generations of Christian men and women, we find the Invisible opening up to us, getting into touch with us, giving to us certain most precious things which we invariably associate with personal companionship, giving us nothing less than a sense of the friendship with us of a Christ-like God. Jesus' image from the past establishes for us a present connection with the Unseen, which we are unable to explain in any other way than by calling it "inter-person commerce."

And what an incalculable amount such a relation with a living divine Comrade adds to life! Listen to a few familiar expressions from men who wrote in the conviction that they possessed it: "Ye are the sons of the living God"; "to serve the living and true God"; "the living God is among you"; "we are a temple of the living God"; "to this

end we labor and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God."

Do those understand the facts of life most correctly who get the most out of them? Does he understand his classmate best to whom his image is merely that of a man with whom he happens to be thrown for four years, or he to whom his image conveys a wealth of friendship? Does he interpret a word aright to whom it is a sound signifying nothing, or he to whom it carries information and affection? Would the friend, whose words we reported a moment ago, have been really more faithful to truth, had he, doing violence to his sentiment, allowed the most helpful notion in his mind to be carried out? If through the image which your classmate presents to your eye you receive from him friendship, you do not question the reality of his existence; he is your living friend. If the notion of God in a man's head is the best notion there, the notion from which he derives most solid and substantial comfort, stimulus, power, does it not carry its own proof of correspondence to reality? Can a man expect to climb outside of himself, and from some external

position see that his notion tallies with an objective fact? Suppose when he prays he feels himself talking into empty air, is he to depend on his momentary feeling as the final test of actuality, and could the air transmit an image to him of the unseen God, and prove itself not empty? A personal God can image Himself only in a Person; and it is what the image itself manages to convey to us that establishes what is behind it.

To be sure all our classmates do not appeal to us alike, nor are we polyglots to understand words from all tongues. It requires a capacity in us to interpret and answer the man we meet and the word we hear. Keats has an interesting sentence in one of his letters which runs: "Ethereal things may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—things real, things semi-real, and nothings"; and in the first class he itemizes: "Things real, such as existences of sun, moon and stars, *and passages from Shakespeare.*" It was the poet's soul in him to whom the elder poet spoke. It is the godlike heart to whom alone God can manifest Himself. Deep calleth unto deep; deep

cannot call to shallow. The pure in heart see God. The colloquial expression we used a moment ago in explaining the origin of friendship, is a not inapt description of the commencement of the most vital religious experiences: "He took to me, and I to Him."

Here is the Figure of Jesus Christ; do we take to Him? He manifestly takes to us; we cannot get away from the feeling that He is reaching out to us. Do we answer that outreach? Does Jesus Christ mean enough to us to command our obedience and enlist our devotion in His purpose? If so, something immeasurably great is coming to us through Him, and we are on the road to the living God; or rather, the living God is coming to us. Our evidence that our classmate is a real friend to us does not consist in anything outside of the friendly impression he makes upon us. The proof of God's actuality is not outside of the present friendship He gives us through the image of Jesus. We may not have a vivid feeling of His reality; feelings vary with temperaments and moods; but in devotion to Jesus a wisdom and power and

love are given us, that sooner or later force us to feel that we are in conscious fellowship with God. "If a man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

The living God—is He alive to us? A living God must be a *thinking* and a *speaking* God. Does it occur to us that He is thinking of us, has a specific purpose for us, wishes most eagerly that we should grasp and fulfill it? Do we listen for His thought through some divine word—a Christlike suggestion in a book, from a friend's lips, in an experience, in our own thoughts? Do we interpret every Christlike idea that reaches our minds as a thought that has been first in God's mind, and has been spoken personally by Him to us and carried through the media which transmit the messages of Spirit to spirit?

A living God must be an *experiencing* God. We measure life by capacity for experience; that is the difference between a stone and a man. The events in our world's existence, in our own and our friends' lives, have an effect on God; they

enter into His life. That through which Jesus passed centuries ago—His Mount of Transfiguration, His Gethsemane, His Calvary, His conquered grave—speaks to us of something going on now in the experience of the living God. Our consecrations to fulfill righteousness give us the sense of a responding "Thou art My beloved son," and our treacheries and selfishnesses erect a cross in a Heart where love is pierced by and for us. Do we consider how we are affecting the living God?

A living God must be a *doing* God. Maurice said that Thomas Carlyle believed in a God who lived till the death of Oliver Cromwell; but "My Father worketh even until now." Are we in the habit of connecting every Christlike occurrence with His direct activity—every act of generosity, every movement of men's thoughts towards justice, every craving for truth, every overthrow of oppression, every outgoing of sympathy, every self-sacrifice? Oh, but these are all men's doings. Yes, everything that Jesus did long ago was His own doing, but His discerning eye saw through it another Factor: "The Father abiding in

Me doeth His works." If we are finding the Jesus of the past an image through whom the living God conveys something of Himself to us, in every Jesus-like movement in the consciences, the purposes, the lives of people today we must see God present and active. Do we recognize Him, enter into partnership with Him, feel confident of the success of all that is Jesus-like because the living God is in and behind it, and take our part with it hopefully as those who know that their indomitable Ally is with them on the field?

The living God! What a difference it makes whether He is alive to us or not, literally a world of difference, for we dwell in a totally different universe when He is alive in it with us.

How pathetic it will be when some of us are unexpectedly made aware that He is alive and has been near us all along, although we never suspected His presence, or answered His pleading, or had anything to do with Him, the living God!

How tragic, if we never awake to that recognition; if the image of Jesus never succeeds in conveying anything to us; if the

Word made flesh in Him continues to signify nothing; and we go through life and into death alone, while through the friendliest possible expression of Himself—through the Face of Jesus Christ—God has been trying to get our attention, arouse our sympathy, win our friendship, and give us Himself, the Christlike Father, Lord of heaven and earth—the living God!

XIV

RELIGION—A LOAD OR A LIFT?

Isaiah 46: 1, 3, 4. Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth; their idols are upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: the things that ye carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary beast. Hearken unto Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been borne by Me from their birth, that have been carried from the womb; and even to old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver.

Here is a contrast between gods that men carry and a God who carries men; between religion as a load and religion as a lift. The prophet draws a graphic picture of the huge images of the gods of Babylon bobbing and swaying in a most absurdly undignified fashion on the backs of straining and sweating beasts, as their frightened devotees try to bear them off to a place of safety before the invading Persians. "Things you paraded about," he derisively labels the

deities of these image-revering Babylonians, referring to the processions in which these gods were borne whom now their worshippers carry off in such unceremonious haste. And he compares them with the living God of Israel's experience, who had taken the infant nation in His arms at its birth in Egypt, and had been marching majestically through the centuries bearing it securely. "Even to old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver."

There are many men who view religion as a burden. As they look at it, a Christian has to accept certain ideas regarding God, Jesus Christ, the Bible, prayer, the future life, which are hard notions to make one's self receive. The intelligence has to be forced under them, much as an unwilling mule is compelled to stand still and be loaded with its pack.

A Christian has to adopt certain customs, such as saying his prayers, attending public worship regularly, observing a ceremony like the Lord's Supper, reading his Bible every day; and these customs impress them as a bore. Life lays upon them inescapable

duties; they cannot see why they should cumber themselves with these additional loads. The prayers they were taught in childhood have become useless luggage which they carry along with them for sentiment's sake; they do not feel them of any real power. Church services are frankly an irksome burden beneath which they would not place their backs unless they were constrained to. The Bible is heavy reading, and with the idea of enlightening themselves (which is a prevalent passion) they usually let the Bible alone. They may have brought a copy with them to college which was given them by someone they love, or presented to them publicly on a memorable occasion; but it lies unopened on their bureau or shelf. It never enters their minds that daily contact with its pages would refresh and invigorate them.

A Christian has to take upon himself depressing obligations. His conscience keeps piling upon his shoulders a mass of responsibilities. The moral tone of the college is in part his concern; the agencies at work in it for righteousness have a claim upon his interest and time and energy; the

attitude his classmates take towards his divine Friend touches his sense of honor and loyalty, and he feels that it is laid upon him to see to it that they do not misjudge and misunderstand his God. Above all his conscience forces him to judge himself by an impossibly high standard, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and to task himself with every secret thought, every personal ambition, every acquiescence in social conventions, every expressed opinion that discords with the heart of his Master. And to many this Christian conscientiousness is an intolerable burden. Their consciences, they think, are sufficiently troublesome, constraining them to assume this and that obligation, without having religion break their backs by heaping on a great many more.

Our prophet would tell them frankly that a burdensome religion is a false religion; that a god they think of in certain ideas which they force themselves to believe, worship in forms they spur themselves to keep up, and serve in duties their consciences strap upon their unwilling backs, is a man-made god, a mere idol, not the living and true Creator. He would assure them that

the religion which they feel they do not want, they do well not to want; it is only a revival of ancient paganism. Religion that is a load is not religion, is not fellowship with the Most High God. The test, he suggests, by which a man can find out whether he is dealing with an idol or with the Lord of heaven and earth, is this: Do you feel yourself carrying your religion, or do you feel that it carries you: is it a weight or is it wings?

A Christian's beliefs are not ideas which he compels his mind to accept; they are convictions which grip him. They appear to come to him with hands and arms, and to lay hold of his intelligence; he is aware of being picked up and carried along by them. The truth takes him off his feet, and he is conscious of resting on it, rather than on ground of his own choosing. At first he may struggle, and attempt to get free; or, perhaps oftener, he lies quietly, held fast from the start. After he has been carried some while, it never occurs to him to break loose from the grasp of these convictions; he rests in them, and is borne along by them with supremest satisfaction.

Take any of the fundamental Christian convictions—the lordship of Jesus, and His power to make strong, wise, good, the man who obeys Him; the Christlikeness of God, with whom as our Father we live and work in Jesus; the inspiration of the Bible, which, read under the guidance of Christ's Spirit, supplies us with stimulating, correcting, comforting, transforming disclosures of our God; the cross as the measure of God's love to us and of our duty to men, drawing us irresistibly to His heart and making us take every human being, even those we like least and those we have never seen, to our hearts; the Kingdom of God, the social order of justice, kindness and faithfulness which our Father devotes Himself to bring to pass and to which we, His sons, are committed;—these beliefs are not loads imposed upon Christian minds.

We may remember the day when one of these convictions first came to us, like a towering giant Truth, and caught us up in its arms. We cannot forget the sensation of being raised by it, the feeling of security and satisfaction in its strong hold, the new outlook we had from that unusual height.

Perhaps we cannot recall a day when any of these beliefs first met us, for we have been carried in their embrace from our birth, as they carried our fathers before us. But there came a time when with growing knowledge we looked up critically into the face of the familiar truth that had so long held us. Our fathers spoke admiringly of this and that feature of its face; and these did not happen to be the features that appealed to us; but none the less the face into which we were looking with the sharpness of trained and inquisitive eyes was to us the face of truth. We had no desire to break away; we could not fancy our intelligence thinking otherwise. Or, if in a moment of restiveness we attempted to shake loose and get down and stand on our own feet entirely independent of and apart from this truth, we discovered that it had so tenacious a grip on our intelligence that we could not get away from it. It kept convincing and reconvincing us; and there was nothing for us but to lie easily and confidently, saying, "I am held; I cannot think in any other way." And if we are really being carried along by the conviction,

we would not be loosed from its grasp for anything in the wide world; it is bearing us into life.

If any man here is trying to make himself believe anything about God, or Christ, or the Bible, or the Christian life, let him be sure that he is looking at some man-made view of the Divine, a mere idol. When God's truth comes along, it does its own convincing. There is no getting away from it. Its inescapableness is the test of its divineness.

If any man here has been held under certain conceptions of religious truth which he finds his education or his growing experience of life taking from him, let him not grieve. Some old Bel or Nebo has been unstrapped from his back—that is all. The living Truth cannot be taken from us; or rather, we cannot be snatched out of His arms.

We are never to try to make ourselves believe anything; we are to look up trustfully into the face of the truth from which we cannot get away, and let it take us up, and hold and carry us. We are never to be sorry for any belief that is wrested from

us; but to congratulate ourselves that Bel and Nebo, however helpful they may have seemed, have been pulled off, that the living God may have a chance of laying hold of our minds.

Or take the Christian habits of private prayer, public worship, sacraments, Bible study. If they seem weights to us, not wings, we may be sure that we are not in touch with God through them. The trouble may be that we are not using them to gain fellowship with Him. If we really want God, it is not likely that we shall be bored by these means of realizing His presence and entering His companionship. They are not arbitrarily laid out rounds of exercise, like the prescribed circle in a prison courtyard about which jailors walk convicts for their health; they are the beaten tracks free pilgrims after God have worn through the ages, the paths every believer with a true experience of Him bids us take to find and be with the Most High.

Or the trouble may be in the form of the prayer, the public worship, the Bible study we employ. Others can open for us a great highway to God, but no man can tell

another on just what foot of ground his steps must fall. Prayer, public worship, the Bible—these are the highway ten thousand times ten thousand have used, and without which they assure us they would never have arrived at their intimacy with God; but we have to discover for ourselves how to pray, how to worship helpfully with others, how to get at God's message for us through the Bible. We must learn to be our natural and unique selves on our knees with God; our natural and unique selves with others in social worship, to which we bring our faith and enthusiasm as sacraments to uplift our fellow seekers after Him who is invisible; our natural and unique selves with the choice religious experiences of the past in the Bible open before us, and speaking their messages to our souls. If we have given up forms that were weights to us, we have not lost anything; we must find others that are wings, and seriously set ourselves to find them. The test of the reality of our contact with God through any form is the lift it gives us into higher and larger life. If, as Browning says, there is "a stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too," the up-

raising is not in the mere stoop, but in the lifting God to whom our reverent approach directly brings us.

Or take the responsibilities with which a Christian conscience saddles a man—the sense of personal accountability for the standards and morale of the life of the University to which we belong, of indebtedness to all the producers of the wealth that makes possible our enriching and delightful life here; our consciousness that we must answer for our influence over the men at our side, and give a reckoning as stewards to the wider community beyond these walls for our use of whatever Yale gives us for mind or character; our feeling that we are chargeable to God for our lives, and must plan them from day to day here, and for the years ahead of us, so that He may say, "Well done!"—this conscientiousness is not depressing, but elevating. True, we feel ourselves under great pressure; "I must," we say, "I must be about my Father's business"; "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day, for the night cometh"; but the pressure is a driving force. It lifts us out of ourselves; it gets us over

the obstacles of laziness and diffidence and cowardice; it gives us buoyancy under failure and discouragement. The Christian ideal conscience compels us to strive to reach appears like a steep summit up which we must climb with straining toil; but the Christian who is trying to climb knows that there is an almost resistless pull in the ideal, drawing him and rendering it easier to keep on clambering up, than to turn his back and take his way down. The upward pulling power of the Christian ideal is nothing else than the downward reach and lift of the living God in Christ, like whom we feel we simply must become.

There are a good many people who consider themselves Christians who never convey the impression of being lifted and carried along by a great upbearing Power. They are burdened with something—with fear perhaps, fear of the germs of disease about to infect them, of overstrain about to cripple their nerves, of social upheaval about to whelm them and theirs in poverty; burdened with sorrow, unable to raise themselves under the crushing loneliness that death has let fall upon them; burdened with

problems, the perplexities in their own careers which cause their minds to stagger, the perplexities of our age with its pressing questions in industry, in theology, in politics, in every phase of human thought; burdened with their possessions, which impede them from devoting themselves to unselfish careers and render it incumbent upon them to occupy a fixed social position in the world; burdened with themselves, oppressed with the sense of their own futility, their boredness, the hardness of their task of trying to amuse themselves and forget themselves. A common phase of our day is this consciousness of being restive under some undefined weight that leads people to try to throw off every responsibility as too heavy to be borne—civic duties, Church responsibilities, family obligations. Life in a city with its problems and claims is too tiring, and they flee to the supposedly more restful country, where needs do not thrust themselves so obtrusively and insistently upon them. It is all part of the lack of the sense of being uplifted and upborne, which is the essence of the religious experience. To possess a genuine contact with God is to be

carried by Him so that fear and sorrow and problems and possessions and ourselves are not burdensome because His arms are beneath us and all.

There are a good many people who would like to know whether it is possible to have such contact with the living God. They do not deny His existence, but they seriously doubt whether they have ever been in touch with Him; and they wish they knew where they could see any clear evidence that His hands took hold of them. This prophet, to whom God was the high and lofty One inhabiting eternity, would tell them that in every experience with anything or anybody that lifted them, God was surely placing His arms about them, and they could recognize His divine touch, and, if they let themselves go, they would be carried.

Here is a truth that takes us off our feet, a conviction that binds us in its embrace—that is God. In yielding to truth we are in His arms.

Here is conscience—well, it often seems to do anything but lift us; it knocks us down and belabors us, and leaves us humiliated and bruised all over in the dust. Is not that

the sensation we have when conscience gets through handling us? But as a matter of fact, we know that it never leaves us there. Every knock-down of conscience is a boost up; it is the upward pull of a higher ideal; and that is God, the righteous God.

Here is love—and how it holds a man up! Those who love us, lift us. There is no genuine love in all the world that does not seem to come to us from the heights, to be the downward reach of someone who would do anything to upraise us; and that is God, God who is love.

Here is Jesus Christ—the embodiment of truth, conscience, love. How He towers above us, so that, whenever we look at Him, we have to look up! How He grasps us, so that we cannot think save with His point of view, cannot try to be anything else but like Him, cannot get away from His love which always manages, in our most unbelieving moods and our most selfish states, to keep fast some bit of our nature! How He exalts us every time we take His outlook, or try to be at all like Him, or respond to the pull of His love on our heartstrings! That is God, God coming into direct contact

with us through Jesus Christ; God stooping to us, laying hands upon us, raising us in His arms, carrying us into His life.

Those who give themselves up to the lift of God through truth, through conscience, through love, and supremely through Jesus Christ, know what it is to feel themselves upborne. They are aware of the hold the divine has on them, and are persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, their Lord. The eternal God is their dwelling-place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. "Even to old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; yea, I will carry, and will deliver."

XV

THE OLD, OLD STORY

John 9: 27. Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?

A preacher entering this pulpit, particularly at this season of the year when for a number of you the college course is almost ended, may well ask, as he begins to speak once more of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, "Wherefore would ye hear it again?"

Most of us have listened to the presentation of Christianity in home, Sunday school, Church services, books and Christian characters since our earliest childhood. By a long-established custom in this College, we, its students, hear some phase of the Christian message told us from the University pulpit every Sunday throughout our course. A preacher may try to whet his hearers' interest by exploring some out-of-the-way nook or corner of the Bible, or by selecting an odd text which will rouse their curiosity, or by emphasizing some theological novelty brought into being by an advance

in our world's thought; but the good news that to obey Jesus Christ is, like the man in the familiar story read a moment ago, to be made to see—to live in a world where the light of God's face falls on and alters and beautifies everything—that cannot be news to any man here; it is something to which we have listened a thousand times. What possible good will it do us to hear it repeated? Have we the slightest intention of becoming different men because of it, of allowing Christ to have the sole and supreme control of our lives? Is this morning's service to be just a conventional exercise through which we must go, you and I? Or granting that the purpose of the University in bringing us here is sincere, that we are dealing with something that is overwhelmingly real, life's most momentous interest to some of us, is it conceivable that its telling is far more than a perfunctory usage? "Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?"

There are several reasons which hinder men today from yielding to the persuasive appeal of the personality of Jesus. One of these is the mental bewilderment in which

they find themselves when they ask what is involved in becoming a Christian. There are intellectual problems: How am I to think of God, of Christ, of the Bible, or prayer, of suffering, of death, of the mystery beyond? We appreciate that we live in a world of changing opinions, that the ideas taught us on these subjects and held by a great many good people whom we know, do not seem to us mentally convincing. How are we to arrive at satisfactory convictions of our own? There are such minor, but still practical, questions as, What does loyalty to Christ demand of me in my use of Sunday, and in my attitude to a lot of personal problems of a similar sort? On what basis am I to arrive at my decisions? There are the much more fundamental and more complicated social perplexities. In view of Jesus' ideal of universal brotherhood, His teaching regarding justice and self-sacrifice, how should I order my methods of earning and spending money, what position must I take towards questions of public policy on economic lines, how far can I accept the ideals of my parents, conform to the customs of the particular set of

people with whom I am thrown, be in harmony with the ways of thinking and living that prevail, for instance, here at Yale? Conscientious persons, who are not in the habit of promising without performing, hesitate to commit themselves to Christ, even by registering a secret vow, until they are clear to what they will be committed. We may feel the spell of Christ upon us, we may let His Spirit shape our ideals at a number of points, but we shrink from giving Him full sway, because we do not know where that will take us.

It is fair to say that there is no short cut out of this mental bewilderment. Nobody on earth can tell his neighbor what he ought to think. To follow Christ is to be continually thinking with a mind ready to revise all previous conclusions. But that is not to say that we are left solely to our own intelligences. Men who obey Christ find His Spirit formed in them, and that Spirit is an unerring Guide. Read under the direction of that Spirit, the Bible yields us a few great convictions and determining principles that serve for all practical purposes to keep us right. We are not relieved of

thinking for ourselves. No one can hand us some ready-made beliefs or some universally applicable rules of conduct. We have got to ask ourselves constantly: What is the most Christlike thought I can hold of God, of life, of pain, of destiny? What is the most Christlike use I can make of means, education, friendship? What is the most Christlike solution I can see for any social problem or political question? There is no guarantee against our making mistakes, no assurance that what appears most Christlike today may not be superseded by something that seems more Christlike tomorrow; but no man who conscientiously follows the Spirit of Christ, as that Spirit is breathed on him from the New Testament pages, can be seriously in the wrong. And yet it is not possible to see far when we commit ourselves to Christ. We must regard Jesus as sufficiently trustworthy to be willing to go any lengths to which His Spirit may lead us, relying on the promise, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Another deterrent is the circumstance that the usual expressions of religion bore

some men. They may find Christ gripping their consciences, but they are frank to admit that they have no relish for Bible reading, prayer, a Church service, or for the meetings and work of the Christian Association. They recognize that other men seem to have a taste for these things, but they find in themselves no enthusiasm for them, and often a distinct repugnance.

It is easy to say that a man with such feelings cannot have his heart in the right place towards Christ Himself; and that is partially true. Genuine allegiance to Christ awakens an interest in the Bible, a zest for prayer, a sense of the value of common worship, and a desire to push the aggressive Christian propaganda, here and in the ends of the earth. But it is also true that a man may be loyal to Jesus and be widely out of sympathy with a great deal that other Christians eagerly do in His name. Temperaments and tastes are so different that none of us can prescribe to another the form in which his religious zeal should express itself. A man must be on his guard lest he miss something which the experience of the past or of the great mass of living Christians may

be able to contribute. He must beware of permitting his mood or prejudice or thoughtlessness to determine him, instead of conviction and judgment. If Christianity is to be socially effective it must be backed by men who are not free lances but are willing to accommodate themselves to the Christian Church; and that today ought, in some of its many communions, to furnish a place for every Christian. The point is that, if not in the more common and usual ways, then in some other, a Christian must allow the Spirit of Christ to lead him so to worship and work that his personality is most spiritually enriched and most usefully invested for the Kingdom of God.

But we have dwelt over long on these first two deterrents from full commitment to Christ. It is doubtful whether mental perplexity or distaste for the usual religious practices and institutions holds any sincere man back. When his heart goes out to Christ, he is ready to use his head and think out enough to live and work by, and to adjust himself to be helped and used in some of the fairly varied Church activities of our day. But there are more serious hindrances.

One is a lack of interest in that which interests Jesus Christ. However difficult it may be to interpret some of His sayings, that on which His heart was set is sufficiently plain. Do we share His wishes? What are the things about which we really care? What occupies our thought? On what would we rather spend our money? What item in the newspaper do we look for most eagerly and why? What is the point of view we find ourselves taking on public questions and what sort of reasons prompt us to take it? What kind of conversation do we prick up our ears to listen to and find it easiest to join in? If we are compelled to admit that we are self-centred, that our personal convenience or comfort controls our views, that we do not get up genuine enthusiasm for that which does not seem to promise us some immediate advantage or pleasure, that we are very much afraid of anything that might disturb our present fairly easy manner of life and make us do hard things, of what use is it to sit and listen to One who has turned the world upside down, whenever He has been taken seriously, and who assured His followers

that their first obligation would be to deny themselves and take up a cross? "Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?"

Another obstacle is conventionality. Most of us do not wish to be thought odd. The result is that we are led unthinking to fall in with the ways and usages of the particular group of men with whom we are thrown; or, if we think for ourselves and conscientiously question whether it is right to do as the rest, we are very ingenious in inventing compromises that enable us to appear a little less evil and yet avoid becoming noticeably different.

Further, a man at college, particularly by his senior year, has created a tradition for himself, with which it is not easy for him to break. If one who for nearly four years has never shown any particular religious interest, has never identified himself with the positive Christian forces of the University, has never let his classmates feel that he was throwing his influence, whatever it may amount to, on the side of Christ, should suddenly make himself felt and known as a pronounced and earnest sharer

of the faith and purpose of Jesus, it would attract attention. Perhaps the delighted comment of some of the godly would be as trying as the bantering remarks of the undevout. But in any case it would make a man slightly conspicuous and place him in an unusual position.

Oddity has always been an essential mark of Christianity. Salt, light, leaven, must be different from the mass they season, illuminate, transform. The man who has not the courage to be different, to break with his own past reputation, and the independence to take his own place in fidelity to Christ, irrespective of what anybody or everybody may think or say, need not listen to a message from Jesus of Nazareth. "Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?"

But the most serious deterrent is unwillingness to sacrifice. Some of us are perfectly aware of certain things we should have to stop if we actually gave Christ the rule of our lives, and we do not want to stop them. There are changes, decided changes, we should be compelled to make in our manner of life and it would be inconvenient

to make them. There would have to be a readjustment of our interests, sympathies, expenditures, plans; and we are not disposed to consider a radical, because Christlike, readjustment. We should have to take into consideration a great many people, about whom we do not now bother ourselves; to carry around a much more sensitive and insistent social conscience; to let our convictions find a tongue more frequently; to shoulder responsibilities we have been calmly leaving on other backs; to lift our friendships to a different level; to put religious inspiration unostentatiously and very naturally into our contacts with lives devoid of that element; in short, thoughtfully and thoroughly to go over everything we do, or feel we might do, and allow the Spirit of Christ to settle how we shall live, work, play, spend, worship. It will be a series of Gethsemanes in which we bring ourselves to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." They will not necessarily be a series of sad occurrences; there is a deep satisfaction in genuine self-sacrifice for the best of all causes under the Best of all masters to which no other joy is comparable; but frankly,

they will be hard. There is nothing under the sun harder than to be an intelligent and consistent follower of Jesus. How can it be otherwise when we remember who Jesus is, and recall that He went up to Calvary? Unless we are ready to attempt and reattempt the difficult, why listen to the Crucified and His message? "Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?"

There has not been a thought in this sermon that can be labelled new. We can recall something exceedingly like it in the first sermon we remember hearing, and certainly the point of it is identical with that of every Christian sermon from this or any pulpit. What is there new that we need to hear? What is there new that we do not need to be and to do?

Another college year, for some here their last in this place, is rapidly ending. Is it going to leave many of us in the same noncommittal attitude towards that which is most fundamental—religion? And that means for us not our attitude towards the faith of Mohammed or the practice of Buddha, but towards the convictions and

purpose of Jesus Christ. He has made His appeal to us over and over. There was something mysteriously attractive in His Figure as we saw it through the stories and hymns and prayers of our earliest childhood. There was a fascination for us about Him when we looked at Him in boyhood and saw Him representing our ideals of truth, honor, courage, devotion. Our years here, both in the experiences of this place and in the parallel experiences of our homes and outside interests, have brought their appeals. One cannot mention all the Christian persuasions that have come to us through some telling book; through the first pressure of responsibility convincing us of the need of an unseen Ally; in some enriching friendship that opened up stores within ourselves we had not suspected, and took life down to a deeper level than it had touched before; in the face of some great human need when we were forced to search ourselves and admit our inability to meet it; in the hour when the shadow of death fell on us and a life we prized went out beyond the reach of anything but faith; in some frank and appealing statement of who

Christ is, what He stands for, what He asks of us; in some more convincing life where His Spirit was plainly dominant. Is there any necessity for Christ to bring additional persuasions? What more can there be? "What more can He say than to you He hath said?" Or why must He repeat to us what we have heard so often? "Wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become His disciples?"

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